00038387

BOMBAY BRANCH

OF THE

Royal Asiatic Society.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018

IN TENTS IN THE TRANSVAAL.

BY

MRS. HUTCHINSON.

38387

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1879.

(All rights reserved.)

00038387

PRINTED AT THE CAXTON PRESS, BECCLES.

TO

MY FATHER AND MOTHER,

These Pages,

CHIEFLY COMPILED FROM THE LETTERS WE WROTE TO THEM

DURING OUR STAY IN SOUTH AFRICA,

ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

IN TENTS IN THE TRANSVAAL.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Ship "Danube,"
February 8, 1878.

On the 28th December, 1877, my husband received a sudden order to proceed with his regiment to the Cape. The notice was short, for the emergency was pressing, and he was absent at the time on leave; but by the end of ten days we had settled our affairs, given up our house—for it had been arranged that any of the ladies who chose to accompany their husbands should have a passage given them in the troop-ship—taken leave of our exceedingly juvenile baby, and were watching the receding shores of

Southampton from the deck of the Union Company's steamship *Danube*.

The voyage was much as all voyages are. The bay was fortunately in one of its mildest moods, and most of us were able to enjoy the approach to Madeira, and admire the bold outline of the island, as the *Danube* ploughed her way through the heavy sea. Funchal looked so tempting that January evening, its white houses contrasting so well with the bright green vineyards. Above, towered the mountain gloomy and jagged, but bathed in a soft, hazy light that made the very darkness look tender and winning. It was a great disappointment to us not being able to go ashore, but there is no harbour there nor pier, and such an ugly line of surf was breaking on the beach, that it would hardly have been safe to land. The natives, however, made nothing of it, and crowded round us in their crazy little cockle-shells, selling the baskets and wicker-work chairs which are the great specialty here. Then there were boats crammed to overflowing with dark-skinned boys, all gabbling to each other in Portuguese, and offering to dive for the coins and tobacco which the men threw in most lavishly. They have such

quick eyes that they never failed to trace a sixpenny or a threepenny piece as it sank; and pounced after it like otters, never seeming to mind whether they pitched themselves into the water head over heels, or any way which came first.

The deck was crowded with men selling Madeira work and jewellery, photographs and fruit, each volubly impressing us with the supreme excellence of his particular goods, and the absolute worthlessness of everybody else's.

Our few hours' rest was over all too soon. The flotilla of cockle-boats put off for the shore, one or two of them capsizing in the scramble, the owners of which supported themselves in the water with one hand, while they endeavoured to draw in their floating capital of guavas, oranges, and cabbages with the other.

By the evening lovely Madeira, with its soft yet bright colouring, had sunk like a fairy island in the west, and we were told that the first time the *Danube* cast anchor we should be actually in Africa!

The voyage was not distinguished by any unusual incidents. There were the regulation theatricals, in which we were struck dumb with

admiration at each other's hitherto latent dramatic talent, followed by an unexpected and most excellent champagne supper, at which we were the guests of the captain. There was the musical entertainment given by the soldiers, with the sailors to assist, in which they disguised themselves as niggers and sang songs, many of which contained allusions to our present expedition embodied in verses the quality of which was undeniable, even if the quantity were sometimes a little wanting from a technical point of view.

There was also the regulation storm after we had crossed the Line, which lasted for twenty-four hours, and came on so suddenly that it tore one of the sails to bits before it could be reefed. The screaming of the wind was deafening, and the forked lightning splendid all round the ship. It was a brilliant mauve-and-rose colour, and lit up the ship at night like day, all the colours of the ladies' dresses and the officers' mess-jackets showing up as bright as possible. The thunder would have been grander if there had been any echo. The sea was as still as a lake, all the time a sort of grey, oily-looking expanse, and the sky almost seemed to touch it. The men on the

rigging looked most picturesque, while the lightning ran about the sky and seemed to pour into the sea like streams of fire.

The flying fish, too, were not wanting, and, as usual, of course one flew on deck, then expired, looking much like a herring with a very flat head and great eyes. I was disappointed to see how small the little transparent fins are, with which they fly in a jerking way, like a sparrow or a canary. They looked like flights of swallows skimming close to the top of the waves. When the sun dries their wings, they drop into the water again.

On February 5 we anchored again at Port Elizabeth, having only caught a transient vision of Capetown and Table Bay as we swept past without stopping.

Those amongst us who had been feeding their imaginations by picturing a land of "sunny fountains" and "golden sands," according to the gorgeous imagery of poets (which is clearly to be understood in a sense peculiar to itself), had now to surrender an illusion. I frankly own that, for my part, I had expected to feast my eyes on groves of palm trees fringing the shore, and was horribly

disappointed at seeing a commonplace-looking town, not very unlike Aldershot, apparently dropped from the skies upon the beach, grilling in the pale orange light, with a treeless waste of sand surrounding it on every side.

I was told that there were fine trees on the other side of the hill, and my husband and I took the trouble of landing and climbing it to see; but, except some oleanders and hedges of prickly pear, which latter have left mementoes of themselves sticking in my fingers that will last for days to come, we could discover nothing to reward our exertions.

We therefore paid a brief visit to the town, which contains some really fine buildings, and returned to our ship, where we consoled ourselves by giving graphic accounts of the magnificent scenery to be enjoyed on the other side of the hill, to such of our friends as had been too lazy to go ashore.

For the last two days we have been steaming along past the coast of Kafirland, immensely excited at being able to discern through opera-glasses the dusky figures of the lords of the soil, and the funny little beehive huts in which they live.

In another couple of days we expect to be at Durban; and already the bustle of packing up, and hunting in the light-baggage room for our respective boxes, betokens approaching disembarkation.

We passed East London, with its terrible bar, two days ago, and were in rather rough water, as was exhibited by the fact of an old lady nearly seventy years of age, one of the civilian passengers, suddenly disappearing under the saloon table in the middle of dinner. The consternation of the rest of the party will be easily imagined when her seat was suddenly discovered to be vacant, all that was visible being a pair of poor old hands feebly clutching amongst the plates and glasses on the table.

We are all quite sorry that the moment has almost arrived for us to quit the *Danube*, where we have spent three very happy weeks, and face the difficulties and discomforts that may be awaiting us in a new country.

CHAPTER II.

Royal Hotel, Durban,
February 12, 1878.

HERE we are amongst the Kafirs at last, having arrived, after our twenty-eight days' voyage, in the rainy season, with the atmosphere just like a forcing-house!

We did not meet with quite the reception we had expected, for, there being no cable to this place, the authorities had no idea that more troops were being sent here. So, when the *Danube* anchored opposite the Bluff, they boarded us, though there was a high sea running, to ask why we had come. We said to protect them from the Kafirs; and those of us who had been drawing lively pictures of an affrighted population welcoming us with open arms, were not a little crest-fallen at being told there was no

war going on, nor rumour of anything but a little skirmishing some hundreds of miles up country.

The sea being so rough, we were obliged to remain another night on board, while the 80th pitched a camp for us near the town. Next day we landed—a tremendous undertaking, as we had to be transhipped on to a tug-steamer on account of a great bar at the mouth of the harbour, which can only be got over at high tide, and by ships drawing very little water. It was a great business scrambling down the ship's ladder and over the side of the tug; and the women, with whom we went in boats from the one to the other, of course made a point of screaming their loudest every time there came a roll. The men landed in lighters—which were attached three at a time to the tug—and had to be battened down below, as the boats roll and turn completely over on their sides crossing the bar. My husband, who went with them, said it was simply the Black Hole over again.

All were thankful to be landed at last, at midday, under a blazing sun, in regular Indian heat, at Port Natal. Then came a railway journey

of about two miles to the town of Durban, the line running through a sort of low, scrubby bush, where we were delighted with the lovely semi-tropical ferns and plants—most of them at this time in full leaf and flower. Arrived at the station, we were at once surrounded by a crowd of Kafirs, who seized upon our bags and boxes, vociferating at the top of their voices, and begging us to follow them in all directions at once. "Royal Hotel, missis! Me from Royal Hotel! This way, missis!" "Belgrave Hotel! Best hotel! Me show missis the way to the Belgrave!" "Prince of Wales!——" and so on; till it ended in two of us forcing our way outside, and setting off to walk, carrying our bags, etc., ourselves, and unattended, except by our lady's-maids. At that time of the day half the town seemed gone to sleep; and the strange look of the people and the buildings, all steeped in an intensely orange light—much like what one sees in a panorama—together with the strong spicy scents which impregnated the air, gave us a feeling as if we were walking in a dream, which the blistering heat of the sun turned into a sort of nightmare.

We have not yet wholly shaken off the im-

pression, in spite of having partaken of an abominable dinner, and a still worse breakfast, and of having enjoyed some hours' rest (?) in beds—whereon to lie awake was to be poisoned with evil smells, and to sleep, suffocation.

The whole place has an inexpressibly forlorn and neglected air, reminding one of the haunted house in Hood's poem, overshadowed as it is in front by a huge tree fern, and darkened by a rotten-looking balcony. The aspect of the dining-room is in itself sufficient to appease the hungry traveller, and our appetites had forsaken us by the time we had taken our seats in an apartment whereof the furniture and appointments were those of a well-ordered servants' hall. The floor is uncarpeted, and the walls whitewashed, their sole decoration consisting of a sort of immense hatchment, which occupies nearly one side of the room, whereon are emblazoned the royal arms and motto. A strip of greenery hangs above the table to attract the flies—which purpose it undoubtedly serves, seeing they completely blacken the table-cloth and everything placed upon it, and rise in a cloud when disturbed, making almost as much clatter as a flight of rooks.

An air of decay pervades the whole place,* the only redeeming features of which are the amusing freaks of the Kafir waiter, christened by some humorous guest, "Day-Martin," and the handsome coolie girls who officiate as chamber-maids, and who flit noiselessly about with their naked feet, in their amber, scarlet, and rainbow-tinted costumes, with arms and ankles covered with bangles. How these picturesque draperies are wound about them in the first instance, and retained in their proper place when on, is a provoking mystery to us, accustomed as we are to all the systematic entanglements of buttons and hooks and eyes. And this morning, after watching the youngest and best-looking of them making my bed, and having in vain tried to make her understand that I wanted to know how she got into and kept inside those amazing garments, I seized hold of her, with the view of unwinding the cocoon-like foldings in which she was enveloped. But whether I offended against her Oriental prejudices I know not, for she wrenched her dress out of my

* Soon after the above was written, the hotel was closed, and the property and management has since passed into other hands.

hand, and, starting away with a cry of terror, rolled herself up in the curtains, whence she peeped at me with her great brown eyes like a frightened deer, and would by no means be persuaded to submit her toilette to examination. Her more elderly companion, who had divined my purpose, and was enjoying her dismay with fits of uproarious laughter, was so obliging as to divest herself of a very considerable portion of her attire, which she took off and put on so many times for my benefit, that I was soon able to profess my curiosity to be more than satisfied.

The wet and heat combined make this place so unhealthy that we are not to be allowed to stop here, and should have moved to the hills at daybreak, only the rain in the night prevented the men from striking the tents. They hope for better luck to-morrow.

A couple of days before we left the ship, a very elegantly bound volume made its appearance upon the saloon table, in which, we were gravely informed by the chief steward, any complaints respecting his conduct or the attendance of his subordinates were to be entered; or we were at liberty to make any comments we thought

proper upon the treatment we had received during the voyage. Even had any one been so disposed, it would have been impossible to have found fault with a single arrangement. But English people are not very ready at complimentary effusions, so, though we were all conscious that we should like to express our sense of the politeness and attention that had been shown us by everybody in authority on the ship, we each felt quite unequal to putting this sentiment into a suitable form, and each trusted that the grateful task would be undertaken by one of the other passengers.

On the second day I peeped into the volume, to see which of us had been bold enough to assume the office of spokesman, and, finding that no one had as yet ventured on the composition of a testimonial, I persuaded one of the civilian passengers to copy the following verses into the still virgin pages :—

We, undersigned,
Are of a mind
To put our thoughts on paper,
To say that we
Have been to sea
Along with Captain Draper.

All outward bound
From Plymouth Sound,

In *Danube* trim and taper,
We steamed away
For Algoa Bay,
In charge of Captain Draper.

We've left the shore
Three weeks and more,
And since we cut this *Cape*-r
Our thanks are due
To mates and crew,
As well as Captain Draper.

Attendance, food,
Have all been good
Upon this smart sky-scraper;
We hope we may
Return one day
In her with Captain Draper.

And we reflect
That with respect
To this *bateau à vapeur*,
The undersigned
No fault can find.
Three cheers for Captain Draper!

I did not suppose the author would be recognized, as none of them had seen the handwriting before; but when the secret had leaked out, as secrets always do, it met with the usual happy fate of small jokes on board ship, where even the very mildest *jeu d'esprit* never fails to gain with a cordial reception.

All the passengers, beginning with our commanding officer, signed their names in turn; and Captain Draper, taking the will for the deed, expressed himself grateful for the violent poetical effort I had made, and has told me that he intends to see how it will look in print in the next issue of the Natal newspaper. At parting, he presented me with his Madeira armchair, which I hope I shall be able to take home intact, and keep as a memento of the pleasant days spent on board the *Danube*.

CHAPTER III.

Westville,
February.

Our first change of quarters took place on the 13th, when the detachment marched out here early in the morning, and I followed in the afternoon. My move, which promised to be rather a scramble, after the manner of most moves made in connection with the regiment, ended in my coming out in such grand style as astonished my husband and those of his brother officers who witnessed my arrival from their camp on the top of one of the surrounding hills.

I had spent the entire morning tramping about the streets—or rather wading ankle-deep through the sands—of Durban, in search of a conveyance to take me and my maid out to Westville, and was returning to mine inn (where

they had previously informed me that they were at present "out" of such commodities as horses and carriages on hire) when I met the landlord, who, upon seeing me, assumed an air of resentment, the cause of which I was quite unable to divine. He, however, lost no time in informing me that he was at that moment having his horses put to in order to drive me to my destination in his own private carriage, and was deeply hurt at the want of confidence I had displayed in engaging a carriage from a rival establishment. I could only plead, in extenuation of my fault, that so liberal an interpretation of the polite art of speeding the parting guest did not as yet obtain in the mother country. But I did not forget, before availing myself of this handsome offer, to inquire upon what terms it was made. A wave of the hand, and an urgent request for the counter-ordering of the obnoxious conveyance, was the only reply; but this was impossible, inasmuch as it was already at the door, and held its ground stoutly in the face of the opposition coach and team of fine horses that was being paraded up and down the street.

I ended the dispute by despatching my maid

and luggage in chariot No. 1, the proprietor of which, having come in person to drive me (in order to witness the mortification of mine host of the Royal Hotel), went off in a storm of reproaches at the "indignity" that he said I had put upon him. "In consequence of information received," as they say, I declined to mount the box of the break until I had received a distinct assurance that there was to be nothing to pay for so much honour and glory (conduct which, if it had been imitated by some of the rest of our party, would probably have saved them an expense of about five pounds, to which, I believe, they were put after enjoying a similar privilege next day).

The drive was most enjoyable, and we were taken at a capital pace over the ground by the team of well-matched spirited horses, whose handsome appearance and turn-out, contrasting as it did so forcibly with the other appointments of the establishment, afforded me considerable food for reflection as we bowled along.

Durban is a cheerful, bright-looking town; the streets are clean and wide—space being no object here—and the shops good, all necessary clothes and eatables being easily obtainable. But

the situation is low, and the climate at this season considered unhealthy. All the better class of merchants and tradespeople (who constitute the aristocracy) have villas on the rising ground behind the town, in a beautiful suburb called "The Berea."

It took us two hours to drive the nine miles to this place, the roads being nearly knee-deep in mud and sand, through which numbers of immensely heavy wagons, with their "spans" of fourteen and sixteen oxen, were slowly ploughing their way.

The scenery all around was lovely. We passed several of those rocky ravines they call khloofs, with trees, and generally a stream of water at the bottom of them; and I was on the point of asking to have the carriage stopped several times, that I might make a closer acquaintance with the multitudes of beautiful flowering shrubs and plants, amongst which the Kafirs were trotting about, looking, in their nondescript costumes, like some grotesque creatures in a pantomime.

These are all Zulu Kafirs, and are a fine, well-made race of men. They are by no means

bad looking, and many of them have pleasant, mild faces, and obliging manners. They are compelled to wear clothes in the towns, but the articles of dress and the manner of wearing them seem to be left mainly to their own taste and discretion. Something to swear by is evidently *the* point insisted on; and a Kafir may think himself well dressed if he can be accommodated, for instance, with a tall hat and a shirt, or an old mess-jacket, or perhaps a dress-coat, with the fringe which they wear round their bodies very long and knotted, appearing in continuation. Sometimes it is their legs that are covered, sometimes their chests—all different, and all enough to make you die of laughing. As these worthies retire from the centres of civilization, the garments with which their persons are adorned are to be seen disappearing by degrees. Thus, within half a mile of the town, you pass a man carrying his coat; another quarter of a mile, and he has disencumbered himself of his shirt and waistcoat (supposing him to be the proud possessor of such valuables); the remaining articles of his apparel follow in rapid succession, and a

mile or so from town you fall in with parties of gentlemen, clad in the severe simplicity of native dress, and carrying their wardrobes at the end of their knobkerries.

CHAPTER IV.

Spring Grange, Westville,
February 25.

A FORTNIGHT to-day since we landed in this country! Ugh! this horrid heat and wet! Everything that you touch warm and sticky, your clothes all getting mildewed, and you yourself feeling as if you were growing all over with mould! Westville is a kind of scattered village amongst the hills; there are no shops and no hotels, but a few poor houses, into which the owners as a personal favour (everything is a favour out here) and for a substantial remuneration, occasionally receive lodgers from Durban, who are ordered to the country for change of air.

The lodgings we occupy are in the house of a settler, who, having been his own architect, carpenter, etc., has built himself a wooden house,

something after the fashion of Noah's ark. We had expected to have been almost as tightly packed as was the family of the patriarch in that famous argosy; for four small rooms only were to have sufficed for ourselves, one of G——'s brother officers, his wife, and her maid, six souls in all! But a sudden order prevented them from joining us; so we spread ourselves over the whole quarters, and found them none too large, even for our diminished party. As it is, the house is crammed with children, who *will* overflow into our rooms, in spite of all the efforts of our landlady and the black boy-nurse to keep them confined to quarters.

Our hostess is a lady of an independent turn of mind, and cherishes an opinion — not uncommon, I fear, amongst colonists—that she is being looked down upon and sneered at by intruders from the old country. No amount of the most cringing servility on my part can eradicate this painful idea on hers. Except the renowned Mrs. Raddle, I know of no one either in fact or fiction so utterly implacable. Even the abject attempts I have made at establishing more friendly relations, have only added hypocrisy to

my other vices in the eyes of this estimable lady. Soldiers—that is to say, Imperial troops—are looked upon by the good people about here with a certain amount of coolness. What their views may be if any crisis should arise for their services to be called into requisition, it is impossible to say; but at present, as my landlady tells me, with that playful humour which I have learnt to distrust, "We can't see what you have come for, unless it is to make fun of all our poor colonial, old-fashioned ways." It is in vain that I have assured her that my nature is so little adapted for fun, that no amount of cultivation would even enable me to distinguish the point of the broadest joke that was ever made. To be disbelieved is, too frequently, the lot of the ingenuous, and I console myself with the reflection that it has been the fate of greater travellers before. Our appetites, too, are a source of the greatest woe to this excellent woman, and of so much remorse and shame to me personally, that I constantly hope mine, at any rate, will succumb to the force of these emotions. I feel convinced that the poor lady's rueful face, when she removes an empty dish from the table,

and glances with mute but eloquent reproach at us, is photographed upon my brain. I shall be able to recall it to my dying day. At first I mistook the cause of her anguish, and by way of encouragement said—

"No fear that we shall not be quite ready for our dinner, Mrs. ——"

"You always are," she replied, to my unspeakable amazement. "My word, if I'd known what appetites you and your husband have, I'd have put an extra sovereign on the board, I believe!"

This was said as a joke, but it made me so wretched that I resorted to the expedient of getting cold "baked meats" in Durban, and keeping them in a cupboard, so that we might take off the edge of our appetites by a slice of plum-cake, or a penny bun, eaten shortly before dinner. But this device has failed, inasmuch as Mrs. —— has discovered our stores, and regulates our supply on a sliding scale, corresponding to the amount of the provisions we had, as we believed, secreted. Were it not for these domestic difficulties, and one or two other crumpled rose leaves, our position here would be enjoyable enough.

The house is situated on high ground, and the scenery all round is lovely. We have a fine view from our verandah over the hilly and richly wooded country to Durban, six miles off, and can easily distinguish the lighthouse on the point, and the ships lying at anchor in the bay. From the garden we can see the mouth of the Umgeni river to the north of Durban, and indeed there is a perfect panorama of beautiful country, with our little camp perched on the top of a hill opposite our drawing-room window. Splendid flowers, many of them reared in stoves at home, grow wild here in the fields about our house. Phloxes, purple, red, and white (the low sorts) here take the place of daisies. About Durban they are still more plentiful, and the air there is perfumed by the scent of a weed which opens its small orange and crimson and white blossoms as soon as the sun has set. Cape jasmines, looking like large hollies, grow in the bush, their white starlike flowers tipping their dark glossy branches, and the large blue convolvulus hangs in festoons from the trees. The houses here are overshadowed by the bouganvillier, which grows with a luxuriance that those who have only seen the

stunted specimens of it in greenhouses at home can never even dream of. Pineapples—we can buy them for threepence apiece—grow in the gardens in little stiff rows like raspberries (which do not flourish in this damp climate), and outside our house is a plantation of bananas in all the pride of their massive dark-brown flowers and their insipid cotton woolly fruit.

The woods are inhabited by monkeys, and by some very disagreeable snakes, and are also, according to the soldiers—who persist in considering Natal a sort of unexplored, savage country—the haunt of dangerous wild beasts. Many and exciting are the adventures which these worthies, by their own accounts, have in the pursuit of big game, the most notable being the single combat with and defeat of a furious wild pig, of which G——'s colour-sergeant was the hero. So perfectly unacquainted, we were told, was this terrific animal with the human face divine, that it suffered him to approach quite close without manifesting any signs of displeasure or alarm. We complimented him on his performance, but were not without certain misgivings, which were fulfilled when the owner of the beast came to the

camp next day, to demand satisfaction for injuries done to a valuable sow who was taking her walks abroad, and the delicate state of whose health rendered the attack made upon her doubly dangerous. Since the assessment of damages for the shock done to the nervous system of *cochon mère*, the illusion with regard to the bush abounding in big game has been rather dispelled.

There is no illusion, however, about the size, number, and uncanny looks of the insects that infest these parts. I am not one of those ladies who faint at the sight of a rat or a spider, but I confess to an unconquerable dread of a hornet (they are here very long and black, and joined together in the middle with a sort of pipe about the thickness of a horse-hair), or a wasp, or anything that stings. As to the spiders, description and comparison are not my *forte*, and when I say that they are of the Skye terrier "persuasion," I feel that I convey no idea at all of their extraordinary size and hairiness. One of these gentlemen, or rather ladies—for the husband, more diminutive and retiring, is sitting in a corner, looking on—is constructing a sort of aerial maze in the shrubbery outside our garden. She is wearing a costume of

red and grey, extensively trimmed with fur about the legs and arms. Joking apart, her body is the size of an acorn, and the crablike legs and claws in proportion to such ample dimensions. The pouch wherein the material for making the web is kept, and the spinners, are to be plainly seen, as is also the small pair of pincers for twisting and breaking the thread. It is like looking at some creature in a microscope.

With the evenings, a sort of purgatory begins for me. In this stifling heat we are, of course, obliged to sit with windows and doors wide open, and as soon as the lamp is lighted swarms of winged creatures come booming in and troop in endless procession round the light. The van is generally led by our friend the good old English horse-fly. There never is any rear, but all the varieties of moth and dragon-fly follow in their order; with great striped red-and-yellow grasshoppers, that give a click and suddenly light upon your face with their sticky legs; and cockchafers, the object of whose life seems to be to entangle themselves in your hair. I *never can* sit still under this dreadful infliction, and though a course of conjugal reprimands has trained me to

endure this visitation without startling my husband by a constant series of yells, the awful state of heat and terror into which I am thrown when a great beetle cannons up against my nose, or a cricket lights upon the table and begins making at me and doubling up its legs, has always completely prostrated me by the arrival of bed-time, when we are lulled to sleep by the constant hiss of the cicada, and the ceaseless chant "I-z-z-e-e ye! I-z-z-e-e-e ye!" of the musquitoes.

CHAPTER V.

Camperdown,
March 12.

We were not, after all, destined to remain long in our country house. The detachment of troops stationed at Durban having been ordered up country, my husband, in charge of a few men, was sent to relieve it, and on the 2nd we returned, and took up our quarters at the Belgrave Hotel.

When it came to the point, I really believe our late hostess was sorry to take leave of us. "Good-bye," said she, at parting. "I never thought to have liked you so much as I do, that's a fact; but"—with a doubtful smile—"you are always poking your fun at me, you know;" and of this delusion I was obliged to leave her possessed, after all.

Everything in the Belgrave was bright and

clean. Our room opened into the verandah; we had only to step across a little flower-bed to get to the dining-room. This, with the kitchen, was in a little cottage by itself, and was a cool, shady room, with a couple of comfortable punkahs, pulled by the small coolie boy Véra, who brought us our early cup of coffee, and was at every one's beck and call from "early dawn till dewy eve."

The practice of having one's slumbers broken in upon by a turbaned coolie or Kafir, with his woolly head, is rather startling at first to one's insular prejudices; but one soon gets even to look forward to it, and nothing could be more offensively impolite than to decline these well-meant visits.

Had it not been for the musquitoes, which at Durban seem to have entered into a compact to flay you alive, we should have been fairly contented to have spent there the six months which we had been told we might expect to stay.

It was extremely pleasant, after the burden of the day was over, to sit in the verandah, inhaling the spicy scents of the flowers (many of which do not open here till after sundown), and watching the graceful movements of Véra and his brethren

as they glided noiselessly about in their crimson-and-orange turbans and loose flowing robes.

These worthies, together with all the rest of the coloured folks, are rung to quarters in all the large towns at nine o'clock; and it used to be very good fun to see them rushing helter-skelter through the streets to reach their homes before the bell had stopped ringing, pursued by sundry supernaturally active native policemen.

Embarrassing mistakes are sometimes perpetrated by these zealots, and a short time ago they captured a discreet Parsee gentleman, a merchant of consideration, and were only prevented by the exertions of his friends from keeping him in custody till five o'clock next morning.

Soldiers' orders are, unluckily, not of the nature of the laws of the Medes and Persians. We had hardly got to Durban before some potentate made a decree reversing that which had sent us thither, and, exactly a week after our return, we took up our carriages and began our long march to the Transvaal.

Accustomed as we are to these sudden changes, I experienced very little surprise, and only re-

gretted that we had expended so much good British shoe-leather (which, in this country, is a rare and costly article) in our house-hunting expeditions.

Apart from this serious consideration, there was no reason to regret our altered plans. The climate of Durban was unhealthy; the air reeked with abominable smells and the fevers which they generated; and all the necessaries of life were so monstrously dear—eggs, for instance, sometimes costing as much as 3*s.* 6*d.* per dozen!—that it was quite a marvel how people managed to get on at all.

Utrecht, some place about ten miles beyond the Buffalo, which is the boundary of the Transvaal, is, we are told, our ultimate destination. The rest of the detachment have been some days on their way already. We expect to come up with them to-morrow at Maritzburg, as well as the other ladies, who have been sent on from Westville in the omnibus. On hearing where we were to go, my husband made up his mind to leave me behind at Maritzburg, as we were told by everybody that Utrecht was nothing but a wretched Dutch village, with no places for us to

live in, and that only two European ladies had ever gone there. It was, therefore, with a heavy heart that I trudged with him, through the hot sand of Durban, to buy the few things that were required to make him comfortable in his life under canvas.

I bore with tolerable fortitude the trial of setting him up in buttons (which somebody else was to sew on, as sewing is not one of my strongest points); but when it came to the purchase of a charming little Etna stove, with saucepans in which to cook delightful *alfresco* dinners, and a kettle wherewith to furnish forth a series of gipsy teas, my affliction became insupportable, and I gave my husband no peace until I had persuaded him to consent to buy me a horse, that I might go with him and have a taste of tent life, at any rate as far as Maritzburg.

My husband's consent, however, was only half the battle, and that the least important half by far; for on the morning of the day on which he was to begin his march, I received a note, in which he said that he was unexpectedly detained at the barracks, and that unless I felt up to going into the market and buying the horse myself, I should have to be left behind after all.

Of course, I felt up to it. In the face of such a contingency, I would as soon have set out to buy a balloon as a horse—and, in fact, am about as competent a judge of the good points of the one as the other. Accordingly to the horse auction I went, and should probably have got into sad difficulties if it had not been for the extreme kindness of some of the gentlemen staying in the hotel, who volunteered to help me in making so important a purchase; and, to cut the matter short, I found myself, by the afternoon, the possessor of a dark-brown mare, not bad looking, sound in wind and limb, together with a saddle and bridle and all other equipage appertaining.

The bargain was not completed till some time after my husband had been compelled to march his party out; but as I had taken the mare, or rather she had taken me, for a pretty successful trial trip down the street, I felt no uneasiness at being left to come out alone to the camp in the cool of the evening.

Oh, that ride! It is the one recollection connected with South Africa that will recur to me with laughter till my dying day. I may as well say at once that, though I am accustomed to

driving, I know about as much of riding as of navigating a ship, but my dignity would not suffer this to appear; so I scrambled into the saddle with any amount of assurance, and as (I suppose from looking at other people) I found I was able to assume a fairly square seat, I produced upon the party assembled to see me off a far better impression of my skill than I either pretended to or deserved.

The mare, however, was not to be taken in. Before we had gone fifty yards from the door, the intelligent creature set off at a smart trot, evincing a desire to get over the ground with which I fully sympathized. The trot, however, quickened into a canter, which became faster and faster; and by the time we had got into the principal street of Durban, we were dashing along in fine imitation of the great Gilpin, avoiding collision with the carriages and great ox-waggons by what appeared to be either a miracle, or some extraordinary talent for judging distances on the part of the mare. It was not that I would not have stopped if I could. I twisted the reins round my arm, round the pommel, and even thought, impelled by phaeton experiences, of try-

ing to get them round my leg, and pulled with all my might, first this way, then that, then all together. But I did not know then, what I now hear to be a notorious fact, namely, that a Cape horse has, as a rule, a mouth like the trunk of a tree, and that, once set going, nothing short of a dead wall ahead, or his own disinclination to go on, will stop him. It was the latter which brought the mare to a standstill at last, on the pavement, amongst a crowd of people. A friend who had witnessed our struggles now came up, and implored me, as I valued my life, not to attempt to go any further.

"I must go on," I said, "to Maritzburg. Indeed, I cannot stop." Which was true enough, as, some one having led the mare into the road and pointed her head in the required direction, we were off again, and only stopped when we reached the level crossing, of which the mare insisted on making a careful examination before taking me any further. Being now out of the town, I thought it was safe to give vent to the indignation I had been smothering all the way; and as her head seemed to be the only part where she had any feeling, I fell upon her, and

belaboured her soundly about the ears, which she took in such very bad part that she made a rush for a ditch full of nettles, landed safely on the other side in about ten inches of sand, and there remained with her head towards the bush, and nothing that I could do would bring it round.

I know of no reason why I should not have been there still, if it had not been that a gentleman, in passing, was struck with my forlorn situation, and offered to escort me a few miles on the way to Roy Koppas, where our camp was to be pitched. I need not say that I gladly availed myself of his kindness, and the rest of the journey was made in comparative comfort, with the exception of the last two or three miles, when I had to go on alone and give battle to the mare in the dark.

CHAPTER VI.

Camperdown,
March 12.

ON the whole, my first night in a tent could not be said to realize all that my fancy had painted it. There were no evolutions to be gone through with the Etna stove and gipsy kettle, such as I had pictured; so far the reverse, indeed, that there was this unexpected novelty added to all my other experiences, that for the first time in my life I went supperless to bed.

My husband did not arrive until I had sat for nearly an hour watching the fireflies, and listening to those eternal crickets, on a bench outside the little canteen, as they call public-houses out here, where he had told me to wait. He was beyond measure relieved to find me in such good preservation, and lost no time in

getting our tent pitched on some rising ground, to which we may be said to have waded in due course, for the dew had fallen so heavily that we felt as if we were walking through a river. I was wet up to the waist by the time we reached the tent—which our servant had tried to make more comfortable, by tearing up the long grass with his hands—and lost no time in taking off my dripping habit, and creeping into my blanket-bag for the night. This is not an easy matter, unless one is accustomed to it; and I required a good deal of help, my husband stowing me in, and shaking me down, like a flitch of bacon or a ham, and finally depositing me on my little White's bed, while he made a bed for himself with the rugs and great coats on the ground. The mare was tethered to a peg just outside our door, and the sound of her diligent munching mingled with the flapping of the tent and the jingling of the buckles as we fell asleep. In the middle of the night I awoke. A great moon was staring into the tent; the munching had ceased—the mare had gone!

Though my husband scrambled into a few clothes, took a header into the sea of fog and

mist outside, and searched in every direction, not a trace of her was to be found.

At the discovery of this climax to my difficulties, I could not resist a hearty fit of laughter, though the predicament was more than ludicrous, seeing that it was Sunday morning, with no up-country omnibus running, and that there was no possible house for me to put up at, within several miles.

The rest of the night was spent by G—— in a series of fruitless excursions, and endeavouring, between each round, to bring me to a sense of the lamentable wilfulness that had tempted me to undertake such an expedition.

Daylight, however, relieved our anxiety by discovering our "encumbrance" (for such we had really begun to consider her) in the vicinity of the baggage-waggon, where she had sought the companionship of the mules.

A hasty *cliōta hazari* was eaten, consisting mainly of tinned lobster and tea with a "dollop" of condensed milk in it—which I was grieved to find did not seem a bit more appetizing than such viands are at home—after which, I was hoisted on to the back of the encumbrance, and con-

ducted her without further misadventure to the stable of the hotel at Pinetown.

This is now the third day of our journey, but the mare generously laid down her arms after that protracted struggle on the first evening (in which she clearly had so much the best of it), and we have not had a moment's difference of opinion since. There was a trifling misunderstanding this afternoon, when she, soothed no doubt by the regular tramp, tramp, of the party behind us, was about to compose herself for a nap in the soft, warm sand. The sudden doubling up of her fore legs apprized me of this intention, which I frustrated by tucking myself up into a ball, and rolling out of the saddle with an alacrity that astonished myself as well as every one else that beheld me. Two or three of the men rushed to pick up the pieces, the rest had enough to do keeping their countenances, which they all did, exerting an amount of politeness that I cannot but fear must have strained some of them dreadfully.

I am writing this in our tent, which is pitched just in front of the hotel. A heavy thunderstorm has come on, and the great drops of rain are

rattling like peas upon the tent. The canvas is so dry, too, that we are enjoying a shower-bath in our clothes, and the eggs and bacon that are frying for one of our *delightful* (?) gipsy suppers, are being rapidly converted into soup.

Our first idea had been to dine at the hotel, and on reaching it, almost speechless from heat, dust, and fatigue, we were shown into a sort of lean-to at the back, where a waiter, in his shirt-sleeves, was spreading a table with an exceedingly dirty table-cloth, and, so far as we could see during the intervals of the flies relieving guard over them, very untempting-looking viands. In a few moments a horn was heard outside, four dripping horses galloped into the yard, and we were requested to stand aside while the unhappy slaves of the post-cart gobbled their apology for a dinner.

About five minutes of this scramble more than satisfied us—it is to be hoped it did the travellers themselves, for in very little more time they were hustled back to their uneasy seats, and as we regained the shelter of our tent, we beheld them bumping and jolting over the stones in the distance.

We feel that we have fairly earned our dinner and sleep, as it has been an uphill trudge the whole way, and the roads very sticky. Yesterday we crossed the Inchanga chain of hills; the views all along were very fine—one range of hills succeeding another, and every new turn in the road disclosed some deep ravine, clothed to the bottom with low scrub and ferns, while the jagged outline of the hills beyond was visible above the fleecy clouds. The great want in the landscape of South Africa is that of trees and water. Trees are very few and far between, and when they do come, are poor, weedy things; and the rivers, as a rule, are small and insignificant.

CHAPTER VII.

Maritzburg,
March 14.

ALTHOUGH we had heard so much of Maritzburg as a bright, cheerful little town, our first impression was destined to be gloomy.

We arrived in a downpour of rain, and the entrance to the town from the Durban road is beside a regular grove of weeping willows, which looked doubly sombre seen through the drenching rain, with not a breeze to stir the long branches that dipped into the river.

The "city," as colonists proudly call it, seems a clean, pretty little town, with an air of smartness about it, as if it were still in its first youth and growing vigorously. The freshness of the buildings is not destroyed by coal smoke, or evil emanations from factories, as at home. I

do not believe that there is a single tall chimney in Maritzburg.

The streets are all at right angles to each other, running straight out into the open country, where they die, so to speak, of inanition, and end in nothing but the surrounding grassy plains. It is to be devoutly hoped that the anticipated Zulu war may not end in a general rising of the Natal Kafirs, as some people prophesy, for it is hard to imagine how such a place as Maritzburg could be put in a state of defence. The town is commanded by a fort (Fort Napier), situated on a hill on the up-country side; but there is not the smallest attempt at anything in the way of a fortification, or even a wall of any kind for protection. In the event of an attack, the inhabitants would have to "go into laager," as they call it; that is to say, they would be driven into a regular pound, like a flock of sheep, there to make the best fight they could until a force could come to their relief. There would be nothing to prevent an enemy marching through the town from one end to the other. It would require a very large body of troops to hold such a place as Maritzburg in its present undefended state.

The suburbs, where the houses of the residents stand, each in its little garden with rose hedge in front, are very pretty. A stream of water, kept clear from all impurities by rigorous bye-laws, runs down nearly every street, and the residents, by paying a rate, have the privilege of drawing off the water for domestic purposes. It will be a grand day for the "city" when the railroad is opened to the coast. At present the shops are poorer, and goods of all sorts dearer, than at Durban. On a slight acquaintance, Maritzburg appears about on a par with an average market town at home.

Our visit is, however, not to be a prolonged one. To my delight, on arriving, I found the other ladies had all bought horses, and were not to be deterred from accompanying their husbands in their march up country. Wagons, we were told, would be provided (by private contract, of course), in which we could stow away our maids and our baggage, and also travel ourselves, when tired of riding. And the camp is to be moved to-night and pitched half-way up the Town Hill, partly to avoid the malarious dews of the swampy ground where it is now standing, and partly to

facilitate an early start up country to-morrow morning.

Although stiff as a poker from the unaccustomed exercise, and racked with headache from Durban fever, which attacked me a couple of days ago, and which has made my chest and arms the colour of a boiled lobster, I had to spend the day in the broiling sun, shopping, and adding to our little store a double portion of provisions to be consumed upon the march. A chemist, whom I consulted in the course of my peregrinations, told me that this feverish attack, which is making me feel as if my eyes were being forced out of my head, is due to the pestilential swamps and smells of Durban, where it was a complete epidemic when we left. It has seldom serious results, unless it is suppressed, and I lay great stress upon the fact that I have not time to be ill now. Riding all day under a blazing sun, with a splitting headache and a face like a copper stewpan, may not be the most agreeable thing in the world, but I trust it will prove an heroic remedy, which, from the state of heat that it will induce, will soon drive all such disorders away.

As at Durban, our lines have not fallen in a

very pleasant place. By the advice of friends (who were clearly in the position of the foxes that had lost their tails), we have taken up our quarters in what I charitably hope must be the very worst and most uncomfortable boarding-house in all Maritzburg. To borrow the lines quoted in a work of a well-known authoress :

> " I do not wish to tell its name,
> Because it is so much to blame."

Besides, it is about to be for ever remembered amongst the things of the past; but, as a matter of present fact, it is the most wretched apology for an hotel I have as yet seen in this country—more like a mews for stabling horses than a place wherein to house decent Christians. The rooms (save the mark!) are, furniture excepted, loose boxes, partitioned off in a long thatched building, opening on to a passage out of doors—the said partitions stopping short of the roof by about a couple of feet. In consequence of this space we should, if we felt inclined, be able to join in the conversation of our neighbours—not only those next door, but the dwellers in every room in the row down to each end of it; and as several of

these have brought their families with them, there is every prospect of our passing the night in the utmost sociability, although the prospect of a few hours of uninterrupted sleep on the eve of a long march might on the whole be preferable.

Dinner—or supper, as our evening meal is here called (in deference, I suppose, to the fact of this being an hotel, not a boarding-house)—consisted of several huge dishes of hashes and curry, *réchauffés*, doubtless, of an earlier repast, and was served in a room considerably overcrowded, which the steam from the various hot and greasy dishes speedily converted into a regular vapour bath—a very unpleasant vapour too. These tempting viands were dispensed by the fair hands of the daughter of the house, assisted by her neighbours on either side—Maritzburg gentlemen, engaged in the pursuits of commerce, and evidently *habitués* of the place.

A huge, ugly Kafir, named Dick, clad in a sort of smock, the hue of which would almost lead one to suppose that his complexion was apt to "come off," managed the waiting without assistance. He was an artless and good-humoured child of nature, but laboured under the disadvantage of never

being able to give his attention to the matter—that is to say, the dish—in hand; and, as a consequence of this defect, a stream of gravy was not unfrequently to be seen flowing over the back and shoulders of a guest, while Dick's rolling eyes raked the plate of some visitor in a distant quarter of the room. When these little accidents occurred, Dick would give an elephantine start and hold up his hands, crying, "La, missis!" with an air of amazement bordering on stupefaction, as if for gravy to run out of a dish held upside down were a miracle altogether out of the reach of everyday experience. Upon such occasions, too, the young lady at the head of the table would make a feint of rising from her chair to box Dick's ears—a punishment which she explained was, in the eyes of a Kafir, considered a disgrace when inflicted by the hand of a woman. Acting on this suggestion, when my turn came to be besprinkled with the fat of the land, I called Dick to a sense of his inadvertence by as smart a rap as I was able to bestow upon him in the hurry of the moment. His surprise was, I believe, genuine, as, starting back, he opened his great saucer eyes to their widest, and gave vent to a

prolonged "Oh-oo-oo-o!" ending in a whistle of amazement; and his approaches during the rest of the meal were made with ostentatious caution, as if I were a sort of toy that might explode at any moment in a manner that would be annoying if it were not so insignificant.

The conversation of colonists I have hitherto found to be more distinguished by candour than variety of topics, as it always turns, when we are in the way, upon the presence of the Imperial troops in this country. Considering that we did not come here for our own pleasure, it is a little trying to be asked, in every place we come to, what we came for, and who wanted us? But I dare say we shall quite enjoy it in time as well as the unmistakably sour looks which accompany the query. We have already become insensible to the hints, generally expressed, as to how the New Zealanders were unable to settle their differences with the natives until the Imperial troops had been withdrawn and the farmers themselves called out. In fact, the "young people" out here are evidently dying to show how cleverly they can run alone, and ready to resent any attempt on the part of the "old folks at home" to come to their

assistance. Should the moment ever arrive when they may not only be glad of, but ready to cry for, help, I cannot but think it will teach them a very wholesome lesson, even though some proud stomachs should have to digest a few lumps of humble pie in learning it.

CHAPTER VIII.

Camp, Weston,
March 18.

We arrived at the end of our day's march at half-past one, four or five hours earlier than usual, and it is a great treat having a few hours' daylight after getting into camp, to have the dust brushed out of our clothes, and the contents of our boxes spread in the sun to air. The neighbourhood of my tent, at this moment, resembles a rag-shop, from the dresses of all colours and materials that are drying after the damps and mildews of Durban. A similar state of affairs obtains in other quarters of the camp; and, as privacy is impossible under the circumstances, we make up for it by affecting not to observe each other's movements. It answers nearly as well when you are used to it; there is a great deal in habit and making believe, after all!

I was right in my anticipations of the good effects of hard exercise and roughing it on the Durban fever. Our exit from Maritzburg was made, so far at least as I was concerned, with no further misadventure than my mare, now called "Kafir," shying into a team of oxen, and all but transferring me on to the back of one of the bullocks. (The *unimaginable* toughness of African beef has surprised me less since I have found, from painful experience, how hard the sleek, smooth person of an ox can be.)

Whether it was the hot climb up the tremendously steep Town Hill out of Maritzburg, or the cold night spent in the rain in a swamp on the top of it, or whether it was the perfect fever of nervousness with which I set to work to prepare my first stew for supper, and which caused very beads of agony to ornament my brow, that wrought the cure, I know not; but it is a fact that I got up next morning with all traces of illness vanished, and ready to enjoy an early ride and breakfast at the hotel at Howick.

I may congratulate myself on not having left, at any rate, part of my husband behind at that place, seeing that he went to bathe in the Um-

geni river immediately upon arriving, and was told by a native on coming out that alligators are occasionally to be met with in those waters.

Howick is a pretty, English-looking village, and boasts of two comfortable hotels. It is a kind of Rosherville to Maritzburg, where the "cits" and their families go to spend "a happy day." These expeditions generally take place on Sunday; and, from observation made during our stay at Pinetown—which serves the same purpose for Durban that Howick does for Maritzburg—it appears that the performance of sacred music is one of the chief features of the entertainment. Hymns are sung, in which the visitors, however strange one to another, join as a matter of course, and as far as one can judge, the general tone of religious feeling in the colony seems to be evangelical. The school of thought prevails of which the *Family Herald* is one of the chief exponents.

But, besides this, there are more mundane attractions for the pleasure-seeker at Howick. The far-famed Umgeni Falls are only about three hundred yards from the principal hotel, and are worth coming any distance to see. One has no

idea that any waterfall is near till one comes suddenly upon it. The torrent falls over two hundred and fifty feet sheer, and we were very fortunate in finding plenty of water, owing to the late rains. We stood on the very edge of the precipice and gazed a long time at this splendid sight. The stream being a good deal narrowed at the edge of the fall, adds to the effect of the height. The steam and mist came up from the basin of the fall in dense clouds, so that one could not see the bottom. The point at which we stood went straight down to the river below, and one false step would have sent us flying. I heard the best view was to be got by scrambling down to the river-bed, but as this entailed a considerable *détour*, and a good deal of fatigue, I contented myself with the view from the top. We marched on in the afternoon, and had a steep climb up the Umgeni Heights, at the top of which we encamped. A driving mist had set in, making camp life rather unpleasant; but we soon had our tents pitched, our stove burning, and our ration-meat stewing, and we cared little for the storm outside.

People at home would be amazed if they saw

the roads out here. They are simply awful; not roads at all, in the home acceptation of the word, but simply tracks worn by the passage of the heavy wagons up and down country. Every here and there the unwary traveller is in danger of being swallowed up in a huge hole, about four feet deep and full of mud, out of which no power on earth short of a steam-crane could get one of these cumbersome wagons. Not unfrequently one passes skeletons of oxen which have lain down to die on the road from one of the many mysterious diseases which have hitherto baffled the skill of the colonial farmers; and sometimes, too, we come across a deserted wagon, which has broken down upon the road, and is waiting, shrouded in its tarpaulin covering, for the conductor to return and dig out. The primitive state of the roads no longer surprises any of us since passing a party of Kafirs who were ostensibly engaged in mending them. We particularly observed their method, which was as follows:—

From a group of natives, apparently engaged in forming a plan of the operations, and who may, perhaps, be considered to constitute a sort of staff

of the working party, a Kafir would be seen to detach himself, and, going up to a heap of stones by the wayside, would stand contemplating them, apparently lost in thought for several moments. After what must have been long and anxious deliberation, he would select what generally appeared to us to be the most unpromising stone of the lot, and commence rolling it, with infinite caution, towards its ultimate destination in one of the great holes in the road. Two or three fellow-workmen would hurry to assist him in the performance of this laborious duty, and after a considerable time had been consumed in turning the stone about and settling which end was to go in foremost, it would be at last fixed, as it were, in its socket, amidst much "Oh-ing!" and "Ah-ing!" both from the workers themselves and those who were engaged in doing the looking on. So far so good. The next proceeding would be for the energetic Kafir who had initiated the movement to arrange his scanty attire so as to form a sort of cushion, and to sit down on the edge of the stone, which projected a long way out of the hole, and take snuff, in which he was of course joined by all the rest of the party—for Kafirs always snuff in

company, and knock off work about once in every quarter of an hour for this operation, which is always performed sitting down. (Of course, for the larger holes, for which several stones were required, this process had to be repeated several times.) The next step is to fit the stone to the shape of the hole, which is done by chipping pieces off it with a hammer, each blow being the result of deliberate judgment and much consultation. If, in spite of these efforts, the stone does not seem likely to fit after all, it is dug out, rolled away, replaced by another, and the whole process is gone through over again. It would, indeed, go hard with these diligent creatures if, considering their exertions in snuffing, smoking, and singing, they have not repaired at least one hole at the close of the day's work.

The inns along the road are very clean and comfortable, but very expensive, especially as regards "fluids." A bottle of beer, for example, costs 2*s.* 6*d.*—a price which rather startles one when one considers how well within everybody's reach Bass is at home. Wages, too, are enormous. The proprietor of the hotel at Howick told me that he paid his carpenters 15*s.* a day, and the man who

was engaged in painting the house was receiving 8*s.* per diem and board and lodging!

There is the usual extensive view from here over the never-ending, rolling plains, to which, monotonous as they really are, the changing lights and shadows give an infinite variety. I am sitting outside our tent, enjoying the fine air, and the smell of our neighbour's dinner, which is frying on the grass behind his tent close by. We are all resting, some outside, some within, our tents; the gentlemen in divers descriptions of toilettes that can only be described as a trifle immature. Our horses are wandering about with their legs hobbled, getting their suppers, and the servants are busy arranging the tents, and preparing to cook our dinners.

I often wonder what we should think of such meals at home, and whether any amount of hard exercise there would enable us to digest them. As, for instance, our dinner of last night, when we had a pound of salt pork, and boiled it ourselves (very excellent it was, too), and finished up with some cheese, which I stewed scientifically with beer and butter in the frying-pan. Except to-day, we have only got into camp just before dusk, or

in the dark, twice in the pouring rain, and have only had time to light our little "Eclipse" stove (a most handy and cheap contrivance, exactly adapted for camp life), cook our dinner, help to wash our saucepans, plates, and knives, and tumble into bed, when we sleep with a right good will, that is not to be thwarted by the rain pouring down, or dew rising, or any trifles of that description.

CHAPTER IX.

March 19,
Estcourt—

THE sort of place they call a town out here, consisting of an hotel, a couple of stores or so, and a few farms and scattered houses. I suspect the opinions which travellers form of these "towns" are considerably modified by the fact whether they are journeying to or from the wilderness—*i.e.* up country or down.

After all, marching (on horseback!) is not at all disagreeable, and after the first day one gets quite accustomed to all the discomforts of camp life. The early rising goes most against the grain, but woe betide the sluggard who should turn in his bed for an additional forty winks after *reveillé* has sounded! In about a quarter of an hour more they sound the "dress;" down goes

the tent, and the tenant thereof, surrounded by a little archipelago of boxes, is disclosed to the admiring gaze of "Tommy Atkins," however little he or she may be in a condition to face it with equanimity.

Reveillé goes at four, and our first thought is to jump up, and put a match to our stove, and make a cup of tea to have with a slice of bread and jam (spread over-night), before going out into the cold. To open our eyes is the next thing, and to get the sleep out of them, which we do with the aid of a thimbleful of water in a tin basin, in which grasshoppers, beetles, and other obscene creatures have committed suicide in gangs during the night. After struggling out of the various bags, cloaks, caps, hosen, and hoods, in which we spend the night, into our less complicated day apparel, a search is instituted after the missing soap, fork, or spoon, which is invariably found at night at the bottom of the box of eatables, or rolled up in one of the beds; and then I go outside and sit on a camp-stool while the men strike the tent.

This done, I get on my horse and pick my way cautiously out of the camp, as it is pitch

dark then except for the stars, and the holes in the grass ("veldt," as they call it here) are very dangerous. While I am doing this, I am joined by the other ladies, and we make our way to the road behind one of the big wagons (of which we have thirteen), as we are afraid of losing our way in the gloom. As day breaks—and oh, how chilly it is!—we gradually draw on, and generally contrive to pass all the wagons, and get ahead of the column by the time they come to the first halt.

The roads are now in a terrible state of mud, and so slippery that it would be almost as safe riding upon ice. Our horses slid along to-day at every step, though we went at a foot-pace. *Kafir*, being shod, was the worst of the lot, slipping and sliding about, and finally distinguishing herself by falling down with me between two wagons. But just as I was supposing, from the yells of the dismayed drivers, that I was on the point of being lifted out of the saddle by a pair of horns, she got up again most cleverly, and no one thinks anything of such trifles as a tumble or two here. Broken knees are not of the consequence that they are at home, or

broken necks either, one would suppose from the reckless fashion in which the post-carts tear up and down the hills, and the accidents which are constantly occurring to the confiding passengers.

The ladies ride on ahead till we come to one of the roadside inns, where we stop for breakfast and a few hours' rest. But, early as we are, we have been preceded by an officer in the commissariat, who, I imagine, can never go to bed at all, from the early hour at which he gallops on to choose the camping-grounds, order the rations, and get everything ready for the dinners, etc., at the halts.

By-and-by we are caught up by the column, and then we all sit down to breakfast, and a very sociable, jolly meal it is. The way in which chops, jam, hot rolls, tea, and coffee disappear, shows that Natal air has not hitherto disagreed much with any of us.

After that we either have four or five hours' rest, or go on in the course of an hour and get early into camp, which we like much better.

A great deal of this part of the business is settled by the bullock-drivers, who virtually have the control of our movements in their hands.

When much rain has fallen, the roads become impassable, and at the best of times the oxen cannot travel more than eight miles at a stretch. They are then "out-spanned," and turned loose to feed; and no importunities will induce the drivers to abate a minute of their wonted hours of rest. We have a man riding with us, the master of the wagons, whose word is law; and I heard a rumour that it had been proposed to sound *reveillé* at two in the morning instead of four, but that the wagon-master had decidedly refused to allow his oxen to travel except just before daybreak. So that we owe to him the boon of a couple of hours' additional sleep; and what a boon that is, only those who have to take hard exercise for hours under a burning sun are able properly to appreciate.

The road winds in interminable curves over the hills, and as there is but one we cannot very easily miss it. To-morrow's march is always the last thing visible before we turn in for the night, and, if we could raise a telescope amongst us, I have no doubt the march of several successive days could be seen chalked out on the blue hills ahead.

The scenery is lovely; range after range of hills seen in the early morning through their soft, misty veils, clothed to the summit with grass, with spans of oxen feeding, or flocks of vultures holding a noisy parliament over the body of some unfortunate bullock that has had to be unharnessed and left to die upon the road.

We generally give the soldiers an hour's start in the afternoons, so as to get into camp after they have pitched the tents and got a little settled. The next thing is to change our dress and cook the dinner, which, from the difficulties we have to contend with—arising from our own inexperience, the genteel ignorance of our ladies'-maids, the difficult tempers of our soldier servants, and, lastly and principally, the preternatural resistance of African meat to all ordinary culinary processes—may be regarded as a feat which it is simply marvellous to see performed without failure so many days in succession.

With regard to the beef, which I firmly believe must once have formed part of the carcase of an old "trek" ox, no small amount of force, as well as skill, has to be exerted in preparing it for the table. The vigorous arm of our soldier

servant has to be employed in pounding our beef-steaks for a considerable time with an iron hammer, after which process it only resists the teeth like india-rubber; without it, we should not be able to get them into it at all. And here be it noted, that in the services of the above-mentioned soldier, whom I will here call X——, we are to consider ourselves in the enjoyment of a blessing far above that possessed by any of our friends in the like position, seeing that X—— belongs more to that order of domestics known in civilian life as the family piece, and is by no means to be confounded with the ordinary run of soldier servants. I trust I am not ungrateful for so signal a piece of luck; but it cannot be denied that X——'s temper is of the kind that the French call *difficile*, especially when he is suffering from the paroxysms of acute lumbago, which complaint has persecuted him ever since he landed in this country. This is all the more unfortunate from the fact that X—— is present in Africa solely by his own voluntary act and deed, prompted, as he impresses upon everybody, by purely disinterested motives, and a desire to take care of his master and me. Of course, when you

cannot take care of yourself, the next best thing is to have some one to do it for you; but there are times, particularly dinner-times, when I am so ungrateful as almost to wish——but I never allow myself to get any further than almost!

Our little preparations for dinner are generally the subject of long and anxious debate between Mr. X—— and myself.

"X——, I will say, on getting into camp, "What are we going to have to eat to-day?"

X——, who is probably sitting with his back to the tent, polishing a boot, will give himself a sudden jerk round, as if my query was the most unexpected thing in the world, and will then slap his hand upon his back, and give an emphatic "Wheugh!" This is a very bad sign indeed. "The rations is beef," he will say; "but if you're agoing to have anything else——"

"Of course not," I cry, cheerfully. "Beef, to be sure, and a pudding. X——, don't you think we could manage to have a pudding to-day?"

X—— puts down the boot he is laboriously blacking, and turns an injured countenance very slowly in my direction. (It is astonishing how painfully stiff the poor man becomes, and how

suddenly these attacks seem to seize him.) "*I* never heard of a pudding made without eggs," he says. "Not one as you and the master would care to eat, anyway. And you gave our last egg to Mrs. Chose for her breakfast in return for them two onions as they lent us yesterday."

"But there *are* puddings," I make bold to persist sometimes. "In Mrs. Beeton's Book, page 346——"

"Now, I'll just tell you what it is," says X——, looking appealingly round, as if calling upon the whole camp to judge between us; "I don't set no manner of store by Mrs. Beeton, and that's the truth. What do such people as sit at home and write them books know about camp-life and all the ill conveniences we have to put up with here, before we can as much as get a morsel of beef fried—let alone a pudding? I've done a deal of soldiering and a deal of cooking in my life, and got on well, too, without Mrs. Beeton. Did ye never hear of that plum-pudding as I made for Captain Y—— Z——, when we was in the manœuvres of '72?"

There is an understanding between us that on the rare occasions when X—— resorts to lifting

a profane voice against Mrs. Beeton, the argument is for the moment at an end.

"Ah! that pudding," I say, with an airy good-humour, and not at all as if I were begging the question. "I think you *have* mentioned it before." (I wonder if Captain Y—— Z—— would have been half so sick of that pudding as I am, if he had eaten the whole of it himself at a sitting!) "You must make one like it for us when we have a day's halt again. The air of Africa does not affect our appetites, I find."

"What surprises me," concludes X——, stooping *creakily* over the hole in the ground that does duty for our kitchener, and raking together the few embers it contains, "is how you and the master keep yer 'ealth the way you do. But I doubt if it 'adn't been for me you'd 'ave been but bad off sometimes. Howsoever, 'grumble and go' is my motto, though, what with these shooting pains——"

About this point in the discourse, a violent fit of coughing, which, to a careless observer, X—— might almost seem to court by holding his head immediately over the smoke of the fire, will often terminate the slight skirmishes with which X——

and I, are accustomed to harass each other's forces without occasioning much loss on either side.

Friends at home, groaning under the costly burden of a high civilization, would derive sweet consolation from knowing how we are confronted with the "domestic difficulty," even amidst South African sands and bush.

CHAPTER X.

The same.

ONE of the few amusements of which our monotonous life admits is trying to pick up a few words of the Kafir language—by no means so easy a matter as any of us had at first supposed. To pick up the words, as far as knowing them goes, is easy enough, but to put them together grammatically—a point on which Kafirs (Zulu Kafirs, as all of these are here) insist—is difficult, and to pronounce them properly, hardest of all. My jaw aches with the incessant efforts I have been making for the last three days to pronounce "Cetywayo" (the name of our possible future enemy), with the correct click at the beginning of it, and though I acquit myself very much to my own satisfaction, I perceive all is not quite as it should be, from the faint smiles, politely re-

strained, by which my efforts are met by the wagon-drivers and "fore-loopers" (boys who lead the first pair of oxen), who act as our instructors.

There is something extremely nice and engaging about these people, and even the humbler classes have a natural politeness of manner, which contrasts strikingly with the swagger and vulgarity too often found in certain orders in more civilized societies. I should suppose that such a thing as a vulgar Kafir is absolutely unknown.

We often meet Kafir "runners" taking messages from place to place, carrying their cow-hide shield in one hand, and a bunch of the light-throwing assegais in the other. In passing, they invariably salute us by raising one hand above the head and crying "Inkose," which means "my chief," while they pass at the slinging trot at which they always travel. Kafirs seldom walk; when going a considerable distance their pace is a sort of trot, which they keep up for several hours together, marking time, as it were, with a monotonous drawling song in recitative, generally setting forth an account of their battles, and

what they intend to do to their enemies. They will repeat the same words, and the same two or three notes (which are invariably in a minor key, we have noticed), hundreds of times; and if there are four or five together, they will all unite in the same monotonous chant, as for instance, "Cetewayo is a lion; but somebody else is a bigger lion! He will kill him; he will eat him!" and so on, up hill and down dale for miles, without seeming to lose their wind, or to care to vary the subject of their song.

Many whom we meet can speak a few words either of Dutch or English, and those who cannot are singularly ingenious in making themselves understood by pantomime. We often have conversations with them, the drivers acting as interpreters.

Most of the Kafirs whom we have interrogated agree in saying that Cetewayo, the Zulu king, will not fight unless the quarrel is forced upon him. This idea we deprecate, of course, as being diametrically opposed to the policy of conciliation, which, we are given to understand, is the one which the Government is pursuing at present. Nevertheless, there are not

wanting evidences of a tendency in colonial quarters to distort and exaggerate any of the Zulu king's peccadilloes, which, if not suppressed, must eventually neutralize all the efforts that are being made for peace. I do not believe, for my part, that the Home Government would readily undertake a war which could not fail to prove so long and expensive a one as a campaign against the Zulus must inevitably be. The expense of transport in this country is enormous, and it is evident to us that there is a disposition on the part of the colonists to make the most of their present opportunities, by disposing of their wagons, oxen, and stores of every kind to the Government at absurdly exorbitant rates. The drought, too, which we hear is prevailing up country, would not fail to add to our difficulties in the event of a campaign, while it would not materially affect the Kafirs, who, besides always knowing where to find water, are able to endure the want of it better than the British soldier. Lightly clad, and having no baggage to carry, they can move in large bodies twenty or thirty miles in at least half the time that a column of regular

troops, encumbered with wagons and spans of oxen, would take to get over the distance.

These said wagons, which are the staple of locomotion for "families removing" in Natal, are cumbersome machines, calculated, at their greatest rate of speed, not to exceed two and a half miles an hour. In the present rough state of the country they are no doubt the best means of transport, though it would take a long period of naturalization before one could enter heartily into the spirit of the lay of the minstrel (Christy). Nevertheless, I did "jump into the wagon," to have a ride to-day, in order to give my mare a rest, as she is getting a sore back, to which Natal horses are very subject.

Anything more fatiguing than wagon-travelling can hardly be imagined. The unfortunate inside passenger sits on the floor of the van, and arranges as many shawls, rugs, and pillows about him, to act as buffers, as he can lay hands on. But, in spite of everything he can do, he is thrown all about the whole time as the wagon jolts in and out of holes, often a foot deep, and over rocks and stones that seem as if they would throw him right up in the air. There

are no springs, so it is easy to understand the effect such travelling would have upon invalids recommended to take "carriage exercise." Even I, sound in wind and limb, felt for my teeth, and had misgivings about the integrity of my arms and legs when we arrived at the halt for breakfast. This was made in a valley enclosed by very unpicturesque hills; and we sat down on our rugs and camp-stools, with boxes for tables, while our servants unpacked our stores and cooked our breakfasts, making tea, frying bacon, etc. It was all very sociable and jolly; we were able to perform little friendly offices, such as lending one another bread, butter, washing-basins, etc. Breakfast over, the ladies were very glad to walk part of the next march behind the wagon, instead of getting into it—indeed, one jumped out, terrified at a yawning chasm in the road, and never remembered that she had taken off her boots till she found herself on the ground. The roads were as slippery as glass in the early morning, and the doctor's horse fell down with him and shot him over his head.

A handsome present of flowers and vegetables was sent to us at the place where we breakfasted,

by General Lloyd, whose English-looking house, finely situated on a hill, overlooked the road. Lovely heliotrope, scented verbena, roses, geraniums, and others, names unknown, were divided equally amongst us, together with the more substantial luxuries in the shape of cucumbers, rhubarb, etc., which we carried on to Estcourt for our dinner.

The road was really tolerable, and the views of distant peaks and mountain ranges something exquisite. Estcourt lies in a richly wooded valley, watered by the Bushman's river. The hills stand round it rank behind rank, the distant points seeming to melt into the clear blue sky. You come upon this lovely view after a sudden turn in the road, when you see the valley and the river flashing like a silver streak hundreds of feet below you. It is impossible not to be struck by the boldness and beauty of the scenery, which is never wearying to the eye; but to the ear there is always a sense of something wanting, which makes itself painfully felt even amidst the most perfect country, where the trees and flowers are like the realization of dreams. This is caused by the absence of the song of birds. Those that

we see are well enough to look at, but seem incapable of more than a feeble twitter, at which a London sparrow would flout the tail of scorn. The dwellers in this part of the world have a proverb which they lose no opportunity of impressing upon us, namely, that "the rivers in Africa have no water, the flowers no scent, the birds no song, and the women no beauty" (they, I trust, mean *Kafir* women, of course!). There is nothing like making the best of things; and I suppose the Africanders find something to be proud of in these alleged national peculiarities, from the positively boastful way in which they impress them upon us in nearly every place at which we stop.

We were not sorry to get to our camping-ground by the side of the Bushman's river; and I presented an edifying spectacle peeling rhubarb, scraping carrots, and slicing *the onion*, with the help of my little maid. Peeling the onion is always my business, as there seldom is more than one, which G—— has generally bought at some wayside canteen, and carried all day in his haversack. It is too precious to risk having the least bit of it wasted, so I reserve the eye-watery and

sniffy process of peeling it and cutting it up to myself.

The pot was soon put on, and X——, requesting me to "mind the stew," as if it were a baby, retired to his dinner; while I was left to the anxious task of making the gravy, to which I devoted all my energies, together with considerable quantities of Worcester sauce, flour, and butter, cunningly intermingled in accordance with the directions so ably laid down in Mrs. Beeton's invaluable work. The result was all that could be desired; and having partaken of a comfortable meal of stewed beef, which is but very little tougher than ammunition boots, rounded off with a few kickshaws in the shape of stewed rhubarb, cucumber, and lobster salad, we are now about to assume all our various night-bags, caps, and cloaks, and address ourselves with a serene confidence to repose.

Recent experience has convinced me that the right course to pursue, if you have been guilty of indulging in a somewhat severe supper, is to make all expedition to bed and forget it in several hours' sleep. It would have to be a very serious misdemeanour indeed that could forcibly intrude upon the memory after a hard day's march.

CHAPTER XI.

Ladysmith,
March 22.

We arrived here this afternoon, having crossed the Tugela yesterday at Colenso. The country through which we have been coming for the last two days has been lovely, but the heat so intense that we felt as if our brains were boiling in our skulls. The halts for breakfast have been generally made in perfectly unsheltered places, and we have all thought less about breakfast than of crowding under the wagons to get a bit of shade. Riding under this hot sun for two or three hours, without having had a good meal at starting, exhausts all our energies by the time we get to the halts.

On first setting out, with our teeth literally chattering with cold, and our ulsters buttoned

closely up over our habits, the skirts of which get wet to the waist from brushing the dew off the long grasses which at this season grow saddle-high, we try to beguile the way, as they do in the "Pilgrim's Progress," with profitable discourse, and generally succeed pretty well for the first couple of hours or so.

But the earliest ray which the sun shoots at us from over the mountain-tops is the signal that awakens myriads of flies to fulfil the mysterious purposes of their existence. These armies of Beelzebub are ably led to the attack in several well-organized parties, and we have to take off the handkerchiefs we had put round our necks for warmth, and muffle our faces in order to defend ourselves from their assaults.

At the end of the second hour the talk begins to flag. After the third, we call upon the wagon-drivers and the transport-rider to tell us how many more miles we shall have to go. During the fourth hour we are as mute as fish, and go stumbling with slack reins along the dusty roads, too hungry and too hot to speak. To keep awake is the great difficulty; it seems as if intense heat were nearly as bad as cold for causing overpowering drowsi-

ness, and I have often seen one of my companions riding along in a sound sleep with the flies crawling unheeded over her face. Sometimes we make a push for it, and gallop on to the halting-place with the rider and the commissariat officer. We then tie up our horses' bridles and turn them loose to feed, and, throwing ourselves face downwards amongst the long grass, are asleep in a moment. If the grass is wet, I take off my saddle and sit upon it; and, as a pillow, it is preferable to an ant-hill, or to the thorn-apple plants which form a complete network here under the most enticing-looking grass.

The rumbling of the thirteen wagons, the shrieking of the drivers, and the cracking of the thirteen "shamboks," soon put an end to our doze.

What the lungs of these drivers can be made of, or how they manage to keep up their incessant storm of yells, bellowings, and howls, are mysteries which Europeans cannot hope to penetrate. At every hitch of the great lumbering machine against a stone, or in a hole in the road, the driver shouts, howls, and screams to the straining beasts; applies his formidable "sham-bok" (a whip so heavy that I could hardly lift

one, and which makes a report almost as loud as a revolver) to their sides, knocks his heels against the driving-box, throws himself about as if he were possessed, and threatens every ox separately and individually, calling upon each by name. The fore-looper comes to his assistance by hanging with all his weight on to the first pair of oxen, pounding them with his fists, slapping them with the reins, and gathering up handfuls of dirt and gravel to throw into their faces. The hitch continuing, the noise redoubles; two or three other Kafirs, attached to other wagons, rush delightedly into the *mêlée*. All kick, all shout, and all throw gravel. The driver scrambles down from his box, and runs along to give each pair the benefit of a few strokes from his bullock-hide persuader. The great team sways from side to side of the road as the oxen shy from the application of the whip, which, heavy as it is, the drivers use with so much precision that they can pick out any ox from the spans of sixteen and eighteen, and follow up the warning process of "naming" him with a few admonitory cuts.

The oxen low and snort, and, after a few ineffectual attempts to back and wind themselves

up in the chain, there is a strong pull all together, and the wagon comes out of its hole or over its stone with a great jump and a bang, which has a galvanic effect on any hangers-on that there may be, and causes the "insiders" to see a whole firmament of stars.

The first thing to do when a "span" of oxen is complete, is to christen each member of the team. By the name then given, the beast is invariably addressed, whether for objurgation or otherwise; and Kafirs will tell you that their oxen answer to their names, though I can't say I ever saw them evince such intelligence. "Deutschman," "Kafirland," "Kreutzman," were among the commonest, and there was invariably an "Englishman" in the team. Oh how sorry I was for them all as the whip came down on their devoted backs and sides, and how doubly sorry I was for poor "Englishman!" for Englishman was always the laziest, most stupid ox in the span, and one sometimes felt almost inclined to resent as a personal affront the evident delight which the Kafirs took in belabouring this poor brute on every possible occasion. The stripes that poor Englishman had to

endure, seemed to be no bad test of the Kafirs' real feelings towards us, however they might disguise them with native politeness and courtesy.

Our camp on the night of the 20th was made at a place called Blaawkrantz, and the tents were pitched amidst a grove of mimosa bushes, where the grass was thickly carpeted with flowers. Our little camp, with its lamps and lanterns, looked so pretty in the moonlight, and reminded us of the Boulevards. After dinner we took a cup of coffee at a neighbouring tent, and tried to fancy ourselves in Paris.

I found here a most exquisite variety of the oxalis, having a large pink flower, much resembling a single geranium growing on a long, slender stem. I do not believe I have ever seen so elegant a plant before, but, like all sorrel, it withered immediately on being gathered.

Yesterday's march was the most tedious we have yet made. We spent seven hours roasting in the sun at Colenso, owing to a dispute between the wagon-master and the other authorities as to the proper time for crossing the Tugela river.

Colenso is a town of the usual stamp, consist-

ing of one long street of detached houses, a couple of canteens, and about the same number of general shops—"stores," as they are called here—where you can buy all the old refuse of the Birmingham and Manchester markets, at fancy prices.

Money, we find, has a purely nominal value here, and is, in fact, about the cheapest thing in the colony. If you have any small articles of home manufacture to exchange, you can get more than their full value in store goods. But if you pay in coin of the realm, you are charged absurdly exorbitant prices, which are fixed entirely according to the fancy of the store-keeper, and not regulated by any standard whatever. As you get further inland, also, copper coinage ceases to be current. Kafirs will have nothing to do with copper money, and pennies are quite at a discount here. Threepenny bits are the lowest coins which are in general circulation here; I should think there must be enormous quantities of them in the colony. They are in great request among the Kafirs, who call them "ticcys," and hoard them up for the purpose of paying their annual rents, or whatever their dues to the Government are called.

There is a very clean, tidy inn at Colenso, kept by a gentleman who, we understood, had formerly served as an officer in the army. I rode on early with one of the other ladies, and reached the canteen in time, as we imagined, to secure a capital breakfast for our husbands by the time the column should come up. We reached the inn about eight o'clock, and though that is late for Natal, the lady of the house was not yet visible, and we were received by the landlord, and shown into a pretty, cool little sitting-room that looked quite English with its snug easy-chairs, and book-cases, and pretty water-colours on the walls.

We were famishing with hunger, and counted the minutes till the column should come in sight. But, after waiting till we were faint, a message came up from the river to say that the detachment was going to cross immediately, and we should have breakfast on the other side. There was nothing to be done but to have our horses brought round again, and to make the best of our way down to the water's edge. On reaching it we found only one or two wagons with the oxen out-spanned, and grazing in their usual business-like manner, as if they knew what it was to have no

time to spare. So we had to sit down for a good broil, and wait in no very amiable frame of mind for the arrival of the soldiers.

As soon as the column came down the hill, the tug of war began. The commissariat officer, who is young and energetic, had made up his mind that we should make the halt for breakfast on the further side of the river; the master of the wagons, glorying in his independence, "concluded," as Yankees say, to stop on this. The contention was carried on with great spirit on both sides, and was an edifying spectacle to us who were privileged to sit round on the grass, dying with hunger, while we watched this battle of the gods. While the tumult was at its highest, we attempted another adjournment to the hotel, but were speedily called back to our duty, without having had time to swallow a mouthful of anything more satisfying than soda-water. We were now at the end of the sixth hour, and matters were still at a dead-lock, all of us who constituted the rank-and-file of the opposing armies beginning to look exceedingly grim, and to display a certain amount of tartness in our conversation with one another.

Our young officer, who made up in spirit and resolution what he may have lacked in years and previous experience, evinced every determination to face starvation for himself (and the rest of us) sooner than give way; but as her Majesty's troops must on no account be included in this inconvenience, the men were all transported across the water in the ferry-boat, and sat down to a comfortable meal on the other side.

"There shall be an account rendered for this conduct," said our officer, whose dignity had received unpardonable affront at being publicly bearded by this insolent official. "The man will never have another contract with Government again, I will take care of that."

"My oxen are outspanned, and he may get them in again if he can," announced the other, on the step of the hotel, appealing to Mrs. Chose and myself as the nearest audience. "What do I care for his contracts? Tell me that! The oxen are mine and the wagons are mine. I'm a Natalian, I am. Oh, yes, I'm a Natalian!"

"You're not," said I, mistaking the sound. "Whoever heard of an *Italian* called Dickens? Don't talk such stuff!"

This turned the vials of his wrath upon us.

"I tell you I am a Natalian!" he shouted, absolutely dancing with rage. "I never was so insulted before."

"And we never were so hungry before," we retorted, with pardonable asperity, as we resumed our prowl round the baggage-wagon, in search of something to devour.

"On one point my mind is made up," said I tragically to X——, who had long ago succumbed to the situation. "Come what may, I will *never* be separated from my luggage!"

X——, who had been lying on his back in the eye of the sun, in order that he might be the better able to complain of the overpowering heat, gathered himself together, and approached the wagon with a deplorable limp. "I doubt ye'll have more than that to put up with before the end of this trip," said he, grimly. "You'll be wanting something to eat now, I'm thinking."

"Eat!" I would have given the half of my kingdom to any one who would fry me an egg and a bit of bacon! "If you thought you could light the stove, X——," I say, looking despairingly at the wagon, where a corner of our

provision box was visible from beneath some couple of tons of baggage; "but I'm afraid we should find it very difficult to cook anything in this dust and dirt."

But for once, X——, who by his own account was never able to do more himself than touch a morsel of dry bread at rare intervals, was inclined to humour the infirmities of a less superior organization, and began pulling the boxes out of the wagon, and cutting rashers of bacon; while his groans and ejaculations were fully calculated to impress the bystanders with the idea that he was indeed spending all his last energies in our service.

"I never was one to make much account of difficulties—leastways, not till I got took with these pains," said he. "I've cooked many a good dinner before now in the pouring rain. Did ye ever happen to hear of that pudding as I made for Captain Y—— Z——, when we was at the manœuvres of '72? Mind the pan, ma'am! You must let the bacon warm a bit before you put in the eggs. Well, I was saying, how it did rain then to be sure! and me and W——, as is Captain Chose's servant now, we took off our coats,

and we went and stood one of us on each side of the fire——"

I vow and declare that X—— had proceeded no further in this well-known anecdote, when we heard a shouting and galloping approaching. The rashers, over which I was bending with more than maternal solicitude, were beginning to assume that exquisite, transparent rosiness of complexion, which marks the moment when the first turn is demanded from the judicious *chef*—when the portentous crack of the shambok resounded from just in front of the wagon, and Whiteman, Deutschman, and Englishman drew themselves up in line on the side of the road, and, amidst the usual yells and objurgations, bowed their meek heads to the yoke.

In a trice, X—— had whipped the frying-pan off the top of the stove, and I had the anguish of beholding my semi-cooked breakfast disappear again into the provision box. It is a thing to *laugh* at now, having since partaken of two or three substantial meals, and had several hours' sleep; but at the moment I believe I could have *cried!* But there was nothing for it but to cross the river in the ferry-boat, remount our horses,

and go on to the next camping-ground—a matter of some four or five hours more, sustained only by a hunch of bread and jam, which one of the maids had had the presence of mind to snatch in the confusion of packing up. *Kafir's* back getting worse, I had to resign myself to the wagon, and, in sheer self-preservation, elected to walk nearly the whole of the march.

We did not get into camp till dark, and pitched the tents near a deserted canteen called the Rising Sun. We were all tired out and exhausted from want of food, and made many good resolutions for another day, of keeping a tin of meat open in the wagon, in order to be ready for all emergencies.

CHAPTER XII.

Ladysmith,
March 23.

We are now enjoying our first day's halt since leaving Maritzburg, and most of us are too lazy to do more than remain in camp all day, with the exception of paying a brief visit to the store, where we replenished our canteen with jam and tinned soups and meats.

We have considerably modified our expectations of these towns of the second magnitude since passing Estcourt and Colenso, and were agreeably surprised to find Ladysmith quite on a par with a good-sized village at home. It may not be quite so populous; but there are two or three good stores, a couple of hotels, a gaol, and a very respectable-looking Dutch church and schools. To be sure, one does not see much traffic

in the streets, the inevitable coal cart and "morning's milk" are here conspicuous by their absence. The town, which seems to lie blinking in a sort of sleepy hollow, is awakened two or three times a week by the sweeping past of the up and down country post-carts, and instead of the shrieking gangs of marble-playing, orange-peel-throwing, altogether detestable young fry, who make havoc of the streets and lanes at home, you see good-humoured, grinning Kafir boy-nurses, clad in their loose cotton blouses, carrying out little white-headed babes to play in the warm, brown sand. Ladysmith makes up in beauty, or rather in snug prettiness, for what it lacks in commercial activity and bustle. It nestles, as it were, close to the Klip river, at the foot of a chain of rugged hills, and the picturesque, thatched houses peep out from amidst perfect bowers and clouds of roses, which here take the place of hawthorn hedges at home.

On our way to Ladysmith, the midday halt was made at a place marked on the map as Ostrich Plain. It is quite a small place, well wooded, and by no means the barren tract of country geographers would lead one to suppose.

Those of us who had expected to see ostriches there were disappointed. I never heard of one having been seen within miles of the place during the memory of man; but there were lovely birds that we took for lyre-birds, but which we were told were Kafir finches—black, very handsome, with two long feathers in their tails. These feathers furnish the long plumes worn by the Kafir soldiers in battle and on all occasions of full-dress. They are strung together in bunches, and part of the plume hangs down the back. They look like cock's feathers when made up, and each head-dress contains at least a hundred feathers. When you consider that there are only two feathers on each bird, it becomes evident that many thousands of them must be slaughtered every year. We could not make out what they were when we first saw them, appearing and disappearing, with their long black trains dangling behind them, as they flew in and out of the tall grass. They are clumsy flyers, and on a stormy day must take a long time getting to their destinations, as they are blown all ways by the wind, owing to their unwieldy tails.

As usual, one of the other ladies and I reached

38387

Ladysmith some time before the rest of the party; but were brought up at the entrance to the town by the river, which no persuasions would induce our horses to cross. The commissariat officer, who had ridden on with us, and who was in a happier frame of mind, as he had settled his difficulties by dismissing the turbulent Dickens, struck his heels into his long-suffering pony and floundered across; while we were reduced to the ignominious necessity of the ferry-boat, and our horses were led through by a Kafir.

A bath is generally our first idea on getting into camp, as in dry weather we are powdered from head to foot with dust, which rises in clouds behind the wagons whenever there is a breath of air stirring. With a view to obtaining this indispensable luxury, I left my companion at the river-side, and making my way to what I was told I was to consider the chief hotel in the place, preferred my modest request to an elderly gentleman whom I discovered lounging in the verandah.

These colonists, especially the innkeepers, seem to have a perfectly Oriental apathy and languor about them; and on reaching your hotel, if there should not happen to be a Kafir within call to

execute your behests, the visitor must resign himself to a discussion on the weather, the last smash to the post-cart, the reasons which have brought him to that part of the country, and the merits and demerits of the last hotel at which he has been stopping, before it will occur to the host or hostess to minister in person to his necessities.

After the usual delay, I induced the landlord to show me into a gloomy apartment, more like a larder than a bedroom, where I was told I might expect a bath to be brought to me within a reasonable time—say a quarter of an hour or so. I spent at least as much time as that (during which, I suppose, my host resumed his smoking in the verandah, and forgot all about me) in contemplating the ravages made by ants, and the mouldy strips of paper hanging from the walls; and then, getting tired of waiting, I made my way into the stable-yard, remounted my horse, and proceeded to try my luck at the other hotel.

Here I met with every attention, and no doubt could have supplemented my bath by a capital dinner, had not a severe headache, produced by the fatigue and heat, kept me for the remainder of the day a prisoner to my tent. X——, to do him

justice, made a most assiduous nurse, and was instant in pressing me to partake of beef, fried potatoes, and other delicacies, which he considered especially calculated to tempt the appetite of a person prostrated by an attack of violent sick headache!

It has been a great treat to us all to have a day's rest in camp, beginning with two hours' extra sleep, as *reveillé* did not sound till six instead of four. Oh, what a relief not to have to tumble out of bed in the dark, fumble about amongst the wet grass for the matches, upset the box either into your basin or your bed, and before you are half-presentable to the outside world, hear a few ominous taps on your pegs, and the voice of your servant proclaiming at the door, "Party come to strike the tent, ma'am, if you please!"

"If you please!" It is in such moments as these that one becomes ashamed of the "piles of humbug" there must be in the world, caused by what are styled "the ordinary courtesies of life!"

Pilgrim's Rest,
March 25.

Certainly, England is not the only country in the world with a treacherous climate. We can hardly persuade ourselves that a couple of days ago we were in a state of semi-dissolution from the heat, seeing that we are now shaking with cold at the foot of the Biggarsberg Mountains.

We are encamped in a narrow valley, close to a stream. A collection of Kafir kraals, looking like an assemblage of Brobdignagian beehives, is on one side of the water, and our tents are pitched upon the other. I do not know what I should call this place in correct colonial parlance, for, as at home it takes three people to form a congregation, perhaps, even in Natal, as many houses are required to make a town, and there are only two here—a canteen and a store. They make the most they possibly can of themselves, however, and at each we were particularly assured that there was no connection whatever with the shop over the way.

The little canteen amused us all by being so comically smart and bright, with sky-blue doors, scarlet curtains, and vallance in muslin

bags, looking exactly like the practicable cottage "to memory dear" of melodramatic associations. It was disgusting to be attended upon by a buxom but inadequately girthed Kafir lady, when we half expected to have surprised the disguised countess, all straw hat and blue ribbons and unsophistication, in the porch.

The only spectacle presented to us, however, was that of a semi-wild bull, that was being killed for our rations at the store. It was shot with a bullet just as we came up, and was skinned and cut up on the spot, being no more pleasant to look at than, I dare say, it will be to eat. I confess, for my part, I prefer not to have seen my dinner walking about, at any rate, within some twenty-four hours of being called upon to eat it.

CHAPTER XIII.

Newcastle,
March 27.

We reached this place in time for lunch, and as we can see from our camp the hills that stand round Utrecht, we feel as if we were almost at the end of our long march. Now that it is nearly over, we feel as if it had been a mere nothing, and we can hardly persuade ourselves that we are really looking at the grassy mountains of the Transvaal, which we have been journeying these last two months to reach.

Except for the honour and glory of the thing, we might just as well be upon the Downs at home. There is not a tree, or a plant, except grass, within sight, nor anything to prevent us from fancying we are in England; and if I were to shut my eyes, I really don't believe I should be very much surprised if I were told that I was

to open them the next minute in the middle of Salisbury Plain. Our old friend, the east wind, or something that is a very good imitation of it, is not wanting, and sharpens his knife, to cut one in two, in shady corners and after the sun goes down.

If I were to be asked from which extreme of climate in South Africa one suffers most, I really believe I should say the cold. It is not so much the lowness of the temperature as the sudden changes that are so trying, especially on this high table-land. Though nothing can exceed the baking heat of the sun, during all the hours that it is below the horizon we are shivering with cold, and in crossing the Biggarsberg, all our warm cloaks and wraps were required to keep up the caloric.

It was something fearful to see the post-cart getting up the mountain; the horses stopping to rest every two or three minutes, and then straining on at a gallop over the loose stones. The road-side flowers, especially a sort of primrose-scented clematis, were exquisite, also the rose-coloured, flowering grasses, which give a sort of bloom, almost like the red flush of morning, to the veldt.

At this season of the year numbers of quaint-looking vultures collect when we pitch the camp; they seem to smell it (or I believe I should say, see it) for miles, and though there may not have been one visible when we get to camp, half an hour after the rations have been served out, hundreds of them are fighting and quarrelling over the offal. It has been proved that these great birds do all their catering by means of their extraordinary quickness of sight, and if a portion of the carrion is hidden amongst the rocks they are unable to discover it, no matter how strong it may smell, or how close to it they may be feeding. How great must be the precision and clearness of the sight that, from what appears a mere speck in the blue heavens, can distinguish the carcase of a dead dog, even amidst the immense extent of hill and plain that is stretched beneath it! And what would the Astronomer-royal give, I wonder, if he could apply such an eye to his biggest telescope for half an hour!

We had one or two rivers to cross on our way here, which were rather awkward to get through in the early twilight. Our horses made

a determined stand at the last one, so I climbed up on to one of the companies' wagons, and had *Kafir* led through by a soldier. The men thought it very good fun. We all had to lie down on the top of the baggage, and hold on as well as we could, while the wagon bumped and splashed in and out of holes, and cannoned up against the rocks. We felt as if we were being mast-headed, as the tall pile of baggage swayed from side to side. These wagons never turn over, unless some part of their solid framework is actually shattered, but it is difficult to keep on one without a tilt, unless you are securely roped on, *à la Mazeppa*. The men managed to hold me on and themselves too, and I clasped with ardour a sack of bedding. But I did not feel safe till I found myself once more on *Kafir's* back.

I was glad I had not insisted on riding through, when I heard that the channel was narrow, and the water five feet deep on either side. The other ladies had to pursue the same plan, but they were so long making up their minds, that they did not get through till the column came up. Two or three wagons stuck; I could hear the shrieking of the drivers, and the

moaning of the oxen far away on to the top of the hill, nearly a mile distant.

We made our halt for breakfast two miles out of Newcastle, and to our intense delight found that the English letters had been sent out to meet us. Immediately our little camp was all excitement. No one thought of breakfast, and the canteen, which was turned into the post-office *pro tem.*, was regularly besieged.

We (the ladies) are disposed to regard the canteen-sergeant in the light of a benefactor, seeing that this worthy man keeps a tin of biscuits open for us in his wagon, and is never deaf to the appeals of, "Can you give us a bit of a biscuit, Sergeant A——?" or, "Sure you have got something nice for us in your box this cold" (or hot) "morning?" as the case may be. Of beverages, too, this truly able man has always a stock in hand, of the cooling and insipid class especially adapted to tempt the female palate, and on arriving at the halts, is wont to cry—

"Ladies, there is some first-rate ginger beer on tap this morning;" or, "I have just uncorked a bottle of rare lemon syrup, if you would like to take a drink."

To whom we are ultimately indebted for these favours is a moot point amongst us, but the reflection that we may be "sticking" the Government to the extent of a captain's biscuit, and a teaspoonful of lemon syrup, imparts an infinite zest and relish to these refreshments. Nevertheless, all the memory of past indulgences on the part of the worthy sergeant, would not have prevented our setting our faces like flint against him, if he had not found a letter from England for each of us to-day.

After landing in a new country, the first arrival of home letters is an event to be talked of for days before and after; and our eagerness to read of events that took place some five weeks back (the course of which might very possibly have been entirely altered during that time) would surprise folks at home, accustomed to receiving daily letters, containing a digest of the doings of the day before. At the end of the first few weeks, although the interest remains the same, the excitement gradually subsides.

At the outskirts of Newcastle we were met by an officer of the detachment of troops stationed here, who most hospitably invited us to the mess.

To reach the barracks, we had to cross the Incandu river, which our horses forded very respectably, having, by this time, got so used to wading. Fort Amiel (called so after the colonel of the 80th) is situated on a hill, overlooking the town, and, with very little trouble, the position could be made impregnable to any enemy of the kind that is ever likely to attack it. The barracks are simply a collection of mud houses, but even these are infinitely in advance of tents, inasmuch as you may go to sleep with a well-founded hope of finding your bedroom walls *in statu quo* when you wake in the morning. One or two of the outer coats of dust having been removed in one of the officer's quarters, which was specially fitted up for the ladies with pins and all feminine accoutrements, we sat down to "tiffin" in a very nice marquee, enjoyed the luxury of a table-cloth and silver forks, drank out of wine-glasses, and altogether had a most sumptuous feast. In the evening the 80th entertained us again most handsomely at "mess," and I really think we behaved pretty well, considering how long we had been unused to the restraints of civilization.

We had a very rough night, the wind

blowing hard, and as all the tents are deficient of the proper number of pegs, and many have hardly any left, we were expecting to have them blown about our ears every moment, and the draught and flapping made us have but an uneasy night of it. One or two jumped up, and held on to their poles, under the impression that they were coming down, and most of us spent a good part of the night going round the tents, trying to fasten them more securely. It was horribly cold, and very wretched, but we had our heads well wrapped up, and contrived to sleep, in spite of the wind and the noise.

This morning we went into Newcastle, to see G——, with a scratch eleven, getting a beating from the Newcastle Cricket Club. This club is quite the best in these parts, and is always on the look-out for fresh victims. Of course, there were but few to play on our side, and they all felt rather strange at having to run upon cocoa-nut matting, which is put down between the wickets, as the grass is so coarse, and the ground so uneven and full of holes. My husband told me afterwards that, though of course not equal to turf, this matting made a very fair pitch. The

ball came off it very fast and true, and it was infinitely preferable (so he said) to many grounds at home which cost much time and money.

Newcastle is a "town" (so called) of somewhat more pretension than Ladysmith or Estcourt, and is said by its panegyrists to have a future before it. It is quite possible it may; at present one fails to see any symptoms of it. There are the usual stores, selling inferior goods at exorbitant prices, a few scattered houses, and a church. Coal of good quality is abundant in the neighbouring hills (hence the name), and this, no doubt, will do much for the place when the railway is pushed forward. Newcastle may be called the half-way house between Durban and Pretoria, and so long as this route obtains it may continue to advance; but in the event of the projected railway being constructed between the latter place and Delagoa Bay, which will shorten the distance between the interior and coast some hundred miles, one cannot help thinking that the future of Newcastle may be painted in somewhat too glowing colours.

CHAPTER XIV.

Newcastle.

AFTER "tiffin" we found a light cart and team of mules placed at the disposal of such of the ladies as cared to take a drive. None of them did care apparently, for after parading up and down for some time, the driver was about to take his chariot home, when, thinking it a pity such a courteous offer should go unaccepted, I asked him to take me to see a Kafir wedding that was going on in the neighbourhood, and invited a couple of the ladies'-maids to accompany me. No sooner had I organized this little expedition, than several who had previously refused to go altered their minds, and in the end we were quite a respectable party, some riding, and the rest of us packing up, like the bits of a dissected puzzle, in the mule-cart.

The wedding was at a kraal about two miles from the camp. Shall I ever forget that drive, as we jolted over stones and "shaved" ant-hills, and bumped in and out of holes, the mules all the time going at full gallop, till we really expected that the cart would turn over with us every moment? But we have grown so used to that sort of driving now, that we only laugh and try to avoid having our hats smashed and our heads broken against the sides of the wagons. As we approached the kraal, our ears were greeted by the shrieks, yells, and howls of the wedding party; and, on surmounting a ridge of ground, we came upon a company all in "full fig," practising one of their dances. The men wore large plumes of black feathers, which covered their heads and hung down over their shoulders. They had shields covered with cow-hide, and carried sticks, which they waved and brandished in a very warlike manner. They were continually in motion, stamping, grunting, and shouting, and at last fell into a kind of procession, which moved on towards the kraal, dancing all the way. Every now and then some warrior, more than usually excited, would burst from the ranks, and bound,

with a high-stepping action, several yards in advance. He would then stop, and with queer antics and strange gyrations, would go through the motions of killing his antagonist, continuing them amidst the plaudits of his companions till they caught him up, when he would fall in, only to be succeeded by an excited rival, eager to equal if not to out-do him.

The two sisters of the bride, elegantly attired in a few rows of green, white, and pink beads, accompanied this jovial crew, shrieking and racing about as if possessed. The father of the bride was there too, distinguishable from the other "braves" by the extra length of his tail of feathers, which hung from the top of his head and reached all down his back. As this interesting company proceeded, they were met by women in pairs, all dressed (?) alike in the same charming simplicity, who ran to meet them, screaming at the top of their voices, and making a most peculiar tremulous, shrill noise, which reminded me more of "neighing" than anything else. These fell into the ranks, as did a large company of young girls and children, who all rushed to meet the procession, yelling as loud as they could, and appearing to be quite mad with excitement.

The whole body then advanced at a majestic sort of pace, all taking one step forward at the same moment, raising their shields, giving a stamp and a yell, and so on till they got to a sort of parade-ground in front of the kraal, where they drew up in line two or three deep, and continued the stamping and shouting, waving of arms, positioning, and all the other manœuvres, accompanying themselves by a song, which consisted in the perpetual reiteration of three notes in a minor key. I have ascertained that this tune is the same which is used by them on all similar occasions.

The bride, surrounded by a whole bevy of sisters and sympathizing friends, knelt on a mat facing the dancers, and held a shield and a knife in her hand. Her dress consisted of beads arranged with great taste, and her hair was elaborately got up with the brass wire and palm oil of the period. But what entertained us the most was the *blasé*, contemptuous expression of her countenance, which was evidently the highest mode for Kafir brides to assume.

Here, as amongst more enlightened society, all the interest on the wedding day centres in the

bride, and for one day in her life she enjoys a sort of mock sovereignty before she is handed over to become the slave of her husband.

We threaded our way through the crowd, who made room for us most good-humouredly, and stood close by this interesting creature.

Every now and then some man or woman left the ranks of the dancers, rushed up to the bride, jumping and gesticulating violently, and shrieked out something at her, which, perhaps, it was just as well we did not understand; but I believe it was some kind of badinage, more pointed than polite, which it is the fashion for Kafir ladies to sit to hear on their wedding day. The bride never took the least notice of these witticisms, except that she often threw back her head and shut her eyes with a most disdainful expression. And it would have delighted the soul of the Darwinian philosopher to have observed that in assuming this look she used all the gestures and movements employed by the most highly trained white lady to express similar emotions. Generally she affected not to see these people at all, and she never addressed any one except her attendants, with whom she occasionally laughed and joked.

This performance had been going on since about eight o'clock in the morning. It was now near sundown, and none of the revellers seemed tired. The bridegroom and the rest of the company continued their measured stamping and shouting, as wildly as ever. The noise was stunning. They all seemed pleased to see us, and though evidently amused at our appearance and dress, forbore from any impertinent exhibition of curiosity, and treated us with that unaffected politeness and good nature which is a most winning characteristic of Kafir manners.

After a time, Kafir beer came round in a large sort of calabash, made of clay and elegantly shaped like a cocoa-nut cut in half. It was ladled out by a gentleman in front of the bride, and handed round with profuse liberality. It did not look particularly inviting, but there was no possibility of refusing it. Teetotalism, or even temperance principles, are not understood by even the most advanced Zulus.

The Kafir tasted it first, and then handed me the panakin, out of which I took as deep a draught as I could prevail upon myself to swallow. It was a pinkish colour, of the consistency of

gooseberry-fool, seemed more of the nature of wort than beer, and tasted slightly acid. It was not disagreeable, and I had the presence of mind to say it was nice, at which the Kafir gentleman patted his *waistcoat* and cried enthusiastically, "Good, missis! Ya-as; good, good!" I was nevertheless relieved at finding I was not expected to drink the whole contents of the panakin. Several of the company shook hands with us, and asked us for snuff. A good many seemed rather the worse for the beer, notably one very stout, good-humoured lady, who was extremely coquettish, pretended to be shy, and hid her face on her husband's shoulder.

Soon after this the bride went inside one of the huts, and we were not long in taking our departure. We did not escape, however, without having again to partake of beer, served out this time by the bridegroom, a middle-aged steady-looking gentleman.

He was very sociable and pleasant, and informed us, by counting on his fingers, that this was his seventh wife. We offered our warmest felicitations, with which he seemed highly gratified, and one of our party presented the bride

with a sovereign. The happy man must have been quite a millionaire, for we understood that this wife was to be treated with great consideration, and to have a hut to live in by herself.

As a general rule, the wives all live together. Besides the ten cows, which is the regular fixed price for a wife, he had given a bullock, a sheep, and a kid, to be roasted for the wedding breakfast.

We were not sorry to return to camp, for the evening was getting chilly. No one would believe for what a long distance the measured tread, or rather stamp, of the dancers, sounding like faint thunder, could be heard.

I was surprised to see what really pleasing faces many of the women had, and how tastefully their rather meagre toilettes were arranged. Indeed, though most of us are but plain soldier folk, and unaccustomed to the fashions of exalted society, the lowness of the Kafir ladies' dresses hardly struck us as at all remarkable. The modesty and unconsciousness with which they were worn could not have been surpassed by that of the most artless, white-frocked *debútante* that ever blushed in a drawing-room at home.

When one saw all these light-hearted, good-

humoured people, dancing their quaint steps and brandishing their funny cow-hide shields, one could not help an earnest wish that the war, said to be impending, may, by some means or other, be averted.

Although, doubtless, they can be ferocious enough when excited, as one can see from their gestures and general demeanour, yet there is a simplicity about them which makes them seem almost like children, after all. They themselves deride the notion of a war with us, and declare that the great Cetewayo himself is desirous above all things of maintaining peace. But, of course, at home things can only be known through the representations of people who are on the spot; and there seems to be here a general tending of things towards war, barring, perhaps, the inclinations of the Kafirs themselves.

To those, however, who are well grounded in their "Æsop," and can recall the celebrated dispute between the wolf and lamb, this backwardness will seem the most trifling exception possible; and after all, the war, if war there is to be, cannot fail, I am told, to be productive of the very best results to all parties concerned.

One must hope, therefore, that the Kafirs will accept our apparently violent methods of civilizing them in the spirit in which they are meant, and will cheerfully suffer themselves to be missionized, shot, and bayonetted into tail-coats, monogamy, and trial by jury. They must see—that is, they must be made to see—that it is better to be improved, even if needs be off the face of the earth, than to remain in their present condition of barbarous, if blissful, ignorance.

CHAPTER XV.

Utrecht, Transvaal,
April 3.

We marched out of Newcastle on Sunday, the 30th, after having attended church parade in a marquee, at which we were all present. There was a clergyman, in full canonicals, who read prayers and preached us a sermon; and the singing was very nicely done by the soldiers.

I believe the Kafirs sing extremely well in their own churches at Maritzburg and other large towns, but in their natural state their ideas of music and religion seem the most rudimentary possible; in fact, with regard to religion, they cannot properly be said to have any ideas at all. I heard that they worship the green mamba, a harmless variety of that deadly snake, but could not discover that they had any religious rites, and they certainly have neither temples nor sacred

places of any kind. Although there is said to be no trace amongst them of a belief in the existence of a future state, they have a most particular dread of ghosts, and upon the death of their relatives, are said to take minute precautions to make sure that their good-bye should be a final one.

That they have some ideas of the supernatural is evident from the existence of the rain-makers, a set of functionaries whose trade is, to say the least of it, rather a precarious one—Cetewayo having threatened to kill off two or three of them in consequence of the prevailing drought.

The witch-finder, or "smeller," who is an invaluable ally of the rain-maker, perhaps represents the nearest approach to a priest, and conducts the sacrifice of the unfortunate victims of private malice, who are accused of having, by their sorceries, interfered with the cloud-compelling spells.

The mode of discovering these poor wretches is very imposing, with its incantations and processions round the kraal, its final halt at the hut of the previously unsuspected person, and the inevitable discovery of stolen treasure buried at

the door. But, like most conjuring performances, nothing can be more simple when you know the trick, and, as is generally the case with such experiments, the whole secret is contained in the saying that those who hide can find—the learned smeller having previously conferred with the head man of the tribe, and having himself, in accordance with the chief's instructions, buried the treasure, which he afterwards discovers with so much pomp and ceremony.

Although this does not seem to promise much, the Kafirs have a strict and, on the whole, just code of law, and the infringement of it is punishable by fine or death. The enlightened principles of limited liability not being understood by the Kafirs, every member of each tribe is responsible to the full extent of his cattle, for all his friends as well as himself. And in the event of one man being mulcted in a heavy fine, the whole tribe must pay or suffer the penalty of having their kraals destroyed, and being turned in a body out of house and home. One can hardly imagine a more awkward predicament than that of the unlucky Kafir whose private peccadilloes are the ruin of the entire community.

Lunch being over, we had to prepare ourselves for our final march to the Transvaal, and our kind hosts rode with us a few miles to show us a short cut to the Buffalo river. We were all very much recruited by our three days' rest at Fort Amiel, and shall always retain a vivid recollection, not only of the handsome entertainment we received, but of the hearty good-will and genuine courtesy with which it was offered. People in our position are, perhaps, as well qualified as any to appreciate the difference between that style of entertainment which has a mere formal act of politeness for its object, and that genuine hospitality which has the real comfort of its guests at heart.

By nightfall we found ourselves actually in the Transvaal at last, and were quite astonished to find how much like the rest of the world all we could see of it seemed to be.

We crossed the river in a sort of ferry-boat, and encamped on the Utrecht side for the night. The river was tolerably full, and the oxen had many struggles to get the wagons across. The ammunition wagon stuck for over an hour, although twenty-eight oxen were tugging at it

with all their might. Of course, the more oxen you put on, the more difficult it is to get them to pull all together. These struggled, and fought, and bellowed, and kicked over the chain, and broke loose, and played every conceivable kind of antic; the drivers wading about in the water, and never ceasing to exhort them by name, with yells and howlings, and to belabour them with their terrible whips.

It is easy, when you are on the spot, to realize the advantage the lightly equipped Kafir must have, in moving, over the heavily encumbered British soldier. It will be their own fault if they do not steal many a march upon us in the war that may be coming.

Only one more day's march remained to be made, and on the 1st of April we found ourselves at Utrecht, where tents had been already pitched for us inside a sort of fortification, with walls round it, built by the Dutch—in fact, a laager. We married people respectively appropriated a corner, with the exception of the doctor's family, who remained outside, handsomely accommodated *à la Jarley*, in an ambulance wagon, and are in some respects better off than we are, all penned up in this pound.

We were kindly invited by the officers of the 80th regiment to lunch at the mess, and afterwards dined there. Perhaps it may amuse people to see how we fare in this part of the world, so I give the *menu*, which is very creditable for South Africa.

Pea Soup.
Salmon (potted, of course) and Cucumber.
Sausages. Irish Stew.
Mutton Cutlets.
Boiled Mutton. Roast Fowls.
Plum-pudding. Rice-pudding.
Savoury Omelet.
Cheese. Fried Sprats.
Stewed Peaches. Dessert, etc.

After dinner a soldier was in attendance with a lantern, and we went stumbling over the ditches and trenches in the 80th camp to bed.

Yesterday we spent most of the time in disposing of our small possessions to the greatest advantage, and in making the best of the poor accommodation that the laager affords. In one corner of the wall near our tents is a recess, which X—— has handily turned into a bath-room, by building up the wall in front, and he is going to roof it with the tall reeds that grow in a swamp behind the camp.

After breakfast I went out to have a look at

the town, of which, needless to say, we had heard very considerable things on the way up. I proceeded to the entrance of the laager, and gazed at the outside world, chastened, it is true, by previous experience, but still with a certain amount of curiosity as to what our quarters for, probably, the next three or four months might be like. Twenty miles of desert, absolute desert, without a break—treeless, almost grassless, and covered with a regular eruption of huge ant-hills. This was what I saw. Turning to the left, the same barren wilderness presented itself, with the flat-topped African hills standing like huge pyramids in the distance. Turning to the left again, with my back towards Newcastle, "Surely," I thought, "I must see something now." Still there was nothing but those dreary mountains drawing together at the head of the valley, and forming the barrier between us and Zululand.

I began to wonder whether this town was of such Liliputian dimensions that I might possibly have overlooked it altogether; but on going back into a sort of outer laager, where the prisoners are kept (the clanking of whose chains, by-the-by, has a most ghostly and eerie effect during the

night watches), I beheld half a dozen thatched houses and a few corrugated iron stores, dotted about in a hollow to the north, with a swamp immediately behind, and the great dreary-looking hills rising in the rear.

This, then, was Utrecht, than which there can be few more splendidly laid-out cities—on paper! A nearer inspection introduced me to the market square, and a great many handsome streets at right angles to each other, with a stream of water running down the side of each, and foot-paths, all the better kept for being so very little walked upon. The only things wanted to make Utrecht a really fine town, are the houses and the inhabitants, and nothing but imagination is required to make it fully as handsome a city as the celebrated Eden in "Martin Chuzzlewit."

For those who only care for facts, nothing of Utrecht exists with the exception of a few white-washed cottages, standing in their little gardens, with their fig hedges and rows of standard peach trees before their doors, a frightful little Dutch church, two or three general stores, and several religiously preserved bare spaces, whereon wander a few geese, or cocks and hens, but which, to the

prophetic eye of the true Utrechtians, are graced by the imposing market-house, town hall, and other noble edifices, which they descant upon to the very few strangers who pass, and, I believe, almost persuade themselves exist already in a mystical sort of way. There are said to be about two hundred and eighty white inhabitants, who are nearly all Dutch; the troops would probably add some six hundred to this number.

There is nothing whatever to do, nothing to shoot, no fish to catch, and no one to see. Penal servitude at Portland or Dartmoor would be the wildest dissipation compared with being quartered here. The only thing possible is to take a daily walk to the store—which here answers the purpose of the famous Bath Cat and Fiddle—and ruin ourselves by buying, at perfectly ridiculous prices, articles that are within easy reach of any well-to-do cottager at home. Goods of all sorts are considerably dearer here than in Natal, as they still pay a heavy duty crossing the Buffalo. That this tax is an appreciable addition to the revenue, reflects no little credit on the store-keepers, for there is no custom-house at the river, and our grocer assured us that the returns were left in

great measure to be made by the tradesmen themselves, and smuggling is so perfectly easy that it is hardly even deserving of the name.

However, there is nothing like a good plausible reason for screwing everything out of the helpless consumer. What would not some of our home tradesmen give for a pretext that would enable them to sell a painted tin basin for ten shillings, and common pipe-clay at ninepence a lump,—the men get it for twopence at home! It makes one set great store by the meanest articles of household use, when one has to buy them so very dear;—needles sixpence a packet, and these so evidently made up for exportation, that, on opening one, you are pretty sure to find one-half of the contents guiltless of points, and the other destitute of eyes. We returned from our first expedition to the store, with our ideas on the subject of furniture considerably modified, and the possessors of a small jug, which was intrinsically worth about eightpence, but for which we here paid three and sixpence, and are prepared to value it accordingly. The fact is not that things are so dear, considering the expense of transport, but that money is so cheap, or rather that there is

so little demand for it, that it has no settled value at all. Those who can pay in kind, or exchange their goods with those of the store-keepers, probably find living cheaper here than in most other parts of the colony; but for people like ourselves, who have nothing but hard cash to offer, it is decidedly a nuisance that there seems to be no fixed standard of prices, but that a sovereign is worth twenty shillings in some places, sixteen in others, and not much more than twelve in some out-of-the-way districts—especially as we always seem to hit upon the places where the lowest value obtains.

CHAPTER XVI.

Utrecht,
May 19.

LIFE in the laager is remarkable for nothing so much as its wonderful monotony. There is so little friction from events, that day after day and week after week slip by unnoticed. It would take a Defoe to make the details of such an existence in the least readable. There is an unspeakable sameness, even in the climate; day after day bright sunshine, making the tents unbearable after nine o'clock. No one would believe how tired one can get of fine weather, and how one longs for a good downpour of rain, to wet the tents and give us something to do in moving all our things. One has not even the satisfaction of enjoying the comfortable bit of shade afforded by the "lean-to," which we have

rigged up in a corner of the laager and covered with shawls and rugs, for a cold wind blows incessantly from the hills, and drives us back into the sunshine, which only a few minutes before seemed to be melting the very marrow in our bones.

The extreme dryness of the air is, so they say, due to the proximity of the Kalahari Desert, and the result is so much electricity, that the least friction produces sparks from almost any woollen or hairy material. It was rather startling at first, on waking in the night, to draw up one's rug and find one's hand followed by a stream of brilliant sparks. But we soon got used to that, as also to the cracklings and coruscations that accompanied the operation of brushing one's hair.

We are told that we must expect some terrific thunderstorms by-and-by, and the laager, being built of iron-stone, which abounds in the neighbouring hills, is admirably calculated to attract the lightning, which they say plays round the walls during a storm. Six horses belonging to "Carrington's Horse," standing against the walls, were killed last year by a flash—a pleasant re-

flection for us truly, seeing that our tents and their stables occupy much the same positions!

It would be unpardonable to inflict on any one all the details of our tediousness. The chronicle of one day's doings will suffice to show how time crawls along in this sleepy hollow.

Our day commences at about seven o'clock, when a hoarse, rasping cough, about three yards off, apprizes us that our domestic martyr is about to enter upon his arduous round of duties. A crackling of sticks is next heard proceeding from the kitchen, which is here represented by a pit and trench, situated, as I say, about three yards from where the head of my bed would be—if I had a bed, and if it had a head, which is supposing a good deal in this country. This crackling of thorns is usually accompanied by a soliloquy on the part of the martyr, or perhaps a conversation, carried on by means of shouts, with a fellow-sufferer in a distant corner of the laager, having for its theme the woes of the British soldier on foreign service, and the special and sleepless anxiety borne by the servants who have an incapable set of fine ladies and gentlemen in charge. ("To see to them" is

the technical phrase by which we observe this state of things to be expressed.)

At about eight o'clock a cup of tea makes its highly civilized appearance, and at nine we are fairly roasted out of our tent, and betake ourselves to the discussion of eggs and bacon in the unnaturally cold shade of the wall. At ten G—— goes to parade. Happy man, to have, at any rate, something that he is *obliged* to do!

For the next three hours I loaf about, in the generally vain attempt to find some sort of occupation. We have set up a poultry-yard, comprising six sturdy hens; and one of the most important businesses of my life is to catch these birds and shut them up by turns, with the view of compelling them to lay an egg, allowing a quarter of an hour for each. They have names, corresponding to those of the ladies'-maids, and seem to have a wonderfully clear understanding of their duty. Their lives may be said to hang upon a thread, and the first day in which one of them fails to fulfil her task is apt to prove fatal to her existence.

Many of us keep a supply of hens, but cocks are abjured by common consent, as their crowing

is obnoxious to the repose of the dwellers in the laager. We ourselves were misled at first into attempting to keep one of these nuisances, but as neither entreaties nor force availed to induce him to discontinue his monotonous reiterations, and as no amount of persuasion or of carriage-rugs could disabuse him of the notion that it was broad daylight at three o'clock in the morning, and furthermore, as he was constantly mistaking the "all's well" of the sentries for the challenges of his rivals, and acting accordingly, he made his appearance in a pie, after a brief but tumultuous career, since which time the peace of the laager has been unbroken, save by the pensive cluckings of the widowed hens.

Besides this amusement, there is generally a joint of meat maturing in our larder, which demands an immense amount of care and attention, and of pepper, and of blue gauze draperies, and of wiping with my own hands, and smelling with my own nose, before the critical moment is reached at which we can venture to cook it with some glimmer of hope that we may be able to make our teeth meet in one or two tender places here and there. But the tenderest solici-

tude cannot always guard against the buffets of an unkind destiny; accidents will happen, as witness what befell a shoulder of mutton yesterday, upon which I have been expending nearly a week's forethought and cherishing, as if it had almost been part of my own person.

"X——," said I, almost before we had done breakfast, "we shall have our shoulder for dinner to-day, and one of the officers is coming to help us to eat it."

The words were not out of my mouth before I perceived a sort of saturnine smile dawning on the countenance of honest X——, which prepared me by experience for the disclosure of some horrid calamity.

"It's not much help you'll want, then," said X——, leading the way into our larder, bath-room, hen-house, and general room of all work; "for it strikes me that somebody's been giving you that already."

X——'s manner and barely suppressed glee clearly betokened some domestic misfortune. Nevertheless, there it hung, my cherished joint, dangling in its blue bag at the end of a forked stick in the refreshing breeze. There, at least,

dangled the bag, for, on a closer investigation, I was fain to cry alas! for my shoulder, with its comely proportions all destroyed! Great holes gnawed in every direction, and bone visible in the place of the meat upon which I had been expending so much time and energy.

"Rats!" announced X——, when I demanded an explanation of these appearances. "Rats, coming out of the wall and walking along the stick. I've wondered a many times that they had not done it afore. There's a terrible lot of rats in these parts, to be sure."

"Why did you not tell me," I said, resentfully, "and not let me leave my mutton there? I suppose we shall only have the soup for dinner now?"

I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw another smile overspread but not relax X——'s sinister features. A dreadful misgiving as to the total collapse of my dinner seized me.

"Where is the soup?" I cried, turning to the loophole in the wall, in which we are accustomed to keep such provisions for the sake of coolness. "Which hole did you put it in? Where——?"

Captain Chose's dog at that moment hurried

past with a conscience-stricken air that spoke volumes.

"Yes, where?" cried X——, addressing himself to the dog, and pointing his remarks with several loose stones out of the wall. "You know where, if anybody does, I bet. Where was your nose when I came into the laager at half-past six this morning? Not in my soup-kettle, I suppose? Oh, no! If it hadn't 'a been that I was a'most done over like, with this lumbago, you wouldn't have got off so easy, I warrant. An old thief ye are! Why, if you'll credit it, ma'am, that old dog, when I was servant to Captain Y—— Z——, in '72——"

"Never mind about '72 now," I ventured to say. "*Will* you tell me what we are to have for dinner? There is nothing left, of course, but the cold pie?"

Nor was there much of that left either. To bring this dreary history to a finish. The white ants, during the night, had helped themselves to the greater part of our stores; and the paraffin, which X—— had used to get rid of them, had destroyed the remainder. Providentially, one of our old hens had incurred the punishment of

the pot, so that we were not left to go altogether dinnerless, though it may be imagined that our little party was postponed till a more favourable occasion.

These little *contretemps* happen most days to one or other of us. If it were not for them we should have absolutely nothing to think of, and they give us something to laugh about when they are over. Lunch comes at one, but, unluckily, our appetites in this climate seldom admit of our eating more than a bit of bread and jam, and with the utmost good-will and jam *ad lib.*, it is not given to many people to be able to prolong this amusement for more than a given time—say, half an hour at a stretch.

Lunch over, we sit looking at each other all the afternoon, or toddle to the store, about five minutes' walk. Tea breaks the afternoon, either in our tent or a neighbour's; then we look at each other again till dinner. A game of *écarté* in a friendly tent sometimes finishes the evening, and we go to bed completely tired out with sheer *ennui* and unavoidable idleness. It is the most deplorable waste of life that can be imagined, and it is impossible to make occupation of any kind.

Those who can sleep half the day are fortunate. Some of us pretend to ride, but, stuck down as we are in this kind of basin, all we can do is to ride up the sides of it and down again, and we can see all that there is to be seen for several miles in every direction without stirring a yard from our own tent doors. Reading would be a resource if there were anything to read; but one never realizes how dependent one is for amusement upon books until one has exhausted every possible volume within reach, as is the case with all of us.

We are now rapidly approaching the stage at which we shall be ready to devour what Lamb calls "impossible books"—books of the road, postal guides, and the like. Smollett's works are now going the rounds, and are read aloud to me with great spirit, though I think a more suitable book for the purpose might perhaps be found, if we had the power of making a selection. I have rather an incoherent idea of the plot, as hiatuses are of frequent occurrence during the lecture, when I am given to understand that passages not quite in accordance with modern taste are being skipped. Anything printed is literature here, and if this literary famine is to continue, the

period at which we shall fall back upon the "impossible books," in the shape of old drill-books, defaulters' sheets, and the Queen's Regulations, cannot be very far off.

The social horizon does not, however, present a prospect of unrelieved gloom. Great things are said to be in store for us next week, in the way of rejoicings, which are to be held (for the first time, I believe, in the Transvaal) on the Queen's birthday. And this is not all. Races—positively "Utrecht Races," in which the neighbours within a trifling radius of some thirty miles or so are expected to take part, will be held on the veldt just outside the laager. A portion of the desert, called by courtesy the race-course, has been duly measured out, and ploughed—yes, *ploughed*, in anticipation of this event, and parties of civilians, aided by the soldiers, are engaged in putting up all sorts of insecure-looking structures, to accommodate the *beau monde* of Utrecht and its environs, who, I am told, will assemble on the field in large and fashionable crowds. With regard to the personal attractions of the belles of Utrecht, none of us have much opportunity of forming an opinion, as they remain indoors

during the heat of the day, and, if compelled ot go out, are generally muffled, chins and foreheads, in an Oriental-looking veil; but our excellent store-keeper has given us to understand that many of the toilettes to be displayed on the occasion of the races will be little short of the magnificent. Divers boxes, containing costumes of the chastest, straight from Birmingham and Manchester, have, by a happy accident, just been added to his stock; and as to the bonnets, I caught a glimpse of a gorgeous fabric one day, reposing in a card-board box, and we heard a whisper that several of the latest and most elegant *confections* of British manufacture will be to be seen airing on the heads of lovely Dutch ladies on the eventful day. In that hope we live.

CHAPTER XVII.

Utrecht,
May 26.

ONE great advantage of the climate of South Africa is that in the dry season you can always be certain of the weather, even though you fix your outing for some day, weeks ahead. So it was with easy hearts on this score that we "turned in" on the eve of the Queen's birthday, a day that had been looked forward to by our little community—yes, and by the whole of Utrecht and the surrounding district—with an eagerness that showed only too plainly how dull and monotonous our lives are here. For was not there to be the usual "march past," without which no gala day where the British soldier congregates is complete? and was not the afternoon to decide the merits of many a horse on the race-

course, at which a fatigue party had been busy for some weeks past? The amount of work that had to be done in levelling ant-hills (hard as stone), filling up holes, and even breaking the surface of the ground with the plough, can be hardly realized; but in the end a very fair course was marked out, about a mile in circumference. To see the horses take their gallops in the evening had been quite the fashionable amusement for some time past, and the amicable rivalry that existed between the town and the garrison was quite amusing to witness.

One of the officers had imported from Newcastle a regulation six-stone jockey, and this lad, "got up" in orthodox breeches and gaiters, and looking like a little old man, was the source of much amusement to the heavy Dutchmen, many of whom had some horse entered for the "Garrison Cup," or "Ladies' Purse," and who, I heard, were not at all averse to "backing their fancy," into the bargain.

The 24th dawned with regular "Queen's weather," and by eleven o'clock the whole of the little garrison was drawn up under a blazing sun, to prove their loyalty by that surely somewhat

senseless way of showing it—marching past. There was not a breath of wind, and the Union Jack at the saluting-point hung lazily from its pole. The Boers had turned out in considerable numbers, and watched the proceedings with an air of sulky indifference. They did not attempt to join in the hearty cheers that were given for the Queen, nor perhaps could it be expected, considering how cordially they detest England and the English.

The little army, having thoroughly proved its loyalty, and having got terribly hot in so doing, returned to camp, to prepare for the amusements of the afternoon. The course was close to the camp, and, as I said, was very fairly laid out, considering the difficulties that had to be overcome. No doubt the fortunate possessor of a Derby favourite, or some such priceless racer, would have held up his hands in horror at the state of the ground, which, in spite of the frequent use of the plough, was terribly hard going; but people out here are not apt to set much store by their horses, and nobody thought of not starting them on this account. Horses in this country generally go unshod, except for very rough work—

they do better so. No doubt the very long price of shoeing is one great obstacle, and, as a rule, the workmanship is by no means equal to the sum demanded. The blacksmith at Utrecht asked fifteen shillings for shoeing my mare—no out-of-the-way charge either, I am told, but sufficient to induce me to follow the fashion of the country with regard to *Kafir*, who seems to have fallen into it very easily, so far as we can judge at present.

But we are at the races, which have many excellent points and advantages, chiefly negative, to recommend them to the mere unprofessional sight-seer. Though the grand stand and paddock are perhaps hardly up to the mark of Ascot and Goodwood, the absence of the betting ring and of the din and uproar appertaining, more than compensates for any little shortcomings that there may be in the general appointments and accommodation. All that is really necessary, from the "k'rect card" to comfortable seats and refreshments, is here provided in great abundance. What though there be not a single drag or barouche upon the ground, the majority of us have never even heard that such vehicles exist;

and all of us can make ourselves as comfortable as can be desired in the great ox-wagons ranged beside the course, with rows of chairs inside and a tilt to keep off the sun.

Looking down the course—with the surging crowd of heads and hum of voices, now suppressed in a breathless pause, now bursting into quite a roar of excitement, as the horses and their jockeys, all of them well known to most of the spectators, come with a burst *over the plough* round the final corner—it is difficult to persuade one's self that we are indeed so many thousand miles away from home. The gay dresses, wonderfully improved by distance, dotting the grass with spots of brilliant colour (the Dutch ladies affect the brightest possible attire); the familiar shouts about the odds; *the* dog—positively *the* dog itself—requiring to be exorcised from the course at the last minute, with the usual shouts and hostile demonstrations, and conclusively proving, by its presence here, that its inevitable appearance on such occasions is in accordance with some rigid but unexplained natural law,—would easily lead us to forget that we are not taking part in some little county meeting, or perhaps, as would seem from the strong muster of red

jackets, in some annual sports at Aldershot or some large garrison town. The intense heat of the sun as midday approaches would gradually waken one out of such dreams, and the grand race for Kafirs, that terminated the proceedings, could not fail to dispel the last vestiges of the dear illusion.

This event had been looked forward to by all of us during the first and second day's races with the greatest interest, and for an hour or two before it came off little knots of Kafirs were assembling in front of the stand, their black, good-humoured faces expressing every degree of excitement and curiosity.

The competitors, numbering some forty or fifty, were all drawn up in the paddock, and favoured us with a war-dance, which, I should think, could hardly have been the best preparation in the world for men about to contend in a race. For at least a quarter of an hour they kept up a steady succession of stampings, gruntings, and yells, while every now and then a champion rushed forth from the ranks, in the usual manner, to display his agility by a *pas seul* of marvellous adroitness. Having relieved their feelings in a

manner which could hardly have failed, one would think, to have taken a good deal out of them, the whole troop was marshalled to the starting-point by the landrost or magistrate, who, speaking Kafir like a native, was well able to explain to them what they had to do, as well as to restrain the ardour of the more impetuous.

After several breaks away, the whole band was despatched to a very fair start, and rushed down the course, a confused mass of black bodies, legs, and arms; little parties of Kafir ladies—with their short, frizzy hair dyed and plastered up with red clay, in honour of the occasion—standing with their arms on each other's necks, showing their dazzling rows of teeth, delighted spectators of the scene.

The distance being only two hundred yards, the whole mob was pretty well together all the way, and it could have been no easy matter to decide who breasted the tape first. However, the Kafirs seemed quite satisfied with the decision of the judge when he awarded two brothers first and second prizes; and, grinning from ear to ear, the athletes retired with ten and five shillings respectively, receiving the congratulations of their

fellows as they went. Truly these Kafirs are very easily amused; and we are told, by those who have spent years in the study of their character, that, if taken in the right way, they are not otherwise than docile and easy to rule.

The entertainment was now over, and as we strolled back to our tents, we felt with regret that this long-wished-for day was already numbered amongst the "have beens;" and that the dull routine of our lives was once more about to begin.

In the evening a huge bonfire, composed of great logs of wood and whole mimosa bushes, which the soldiers had been all day piling up, was lighted on the outskirts of the camp, brilliantly illuminating the interior of the laager, and compelling those whose tents were in the vicinity of the fire to keep a sharp look-out upon the showers of sparks that fell from time to time upon the crisp, dry veldt. All were invited to the bonfire, and there was a great gathering of officers and men, with a row of chairs placed on the inside for the ladies, where we all sat rather at the mercy of the wind, which blew the flames about, scorching from time to time first one side of the group and

then another, and looking horribly like the pictures of the inner circles of fire in the "Inferno." We kept up the revel till quite the small hours, while the soldiers enlivened us with songs, comic and sentimental, and day had almost dawned before the last flicker of our fire, which was visible, I believe, from the hills for many a mile around, had died away.

Races and bonfires are all very amusing in their way, and so quiet and monotonous have been our lives of late, that even these exceedingly mild gaieties gave us quite a dissipated feeling. At the same time, we could not help feeling, and expressing as much to one another, that we had hardly come out to Africa with every prospect of remaining inactively in this dismal hole, for months to come, for the purpose of attending bonfires and races, however pleasant. As to fighting—of course, we do not know what undercurrents there may be forcing it on in political circles, but the prospect of it, so far as the Kafirs themselves seem concerned, appears to grow more distant every day.

From time to time messengers, in all the full glory of war-paint and feathers, come in from the

great Cetewayo, to treat with the landrost respecting border questions, compensation for injuries done (or alleged to have been done) to border farms and the like, and we hear that there seems on their part to be a genuine willingness to accept such terms as they consider compatible with their honour and the integrity of their country. As to the formidable Cetewayo himself, his army may be, as is said, a standing menace to our border, but it is none the less certain that our little camp offers a standing temptation to that savage potentate, to which he would not scruple to yield, if he were but half as treacherous and blood-thirsty as his would-be enemies pretend. In spite of Exeter Hall and Bishop Colenso, it would, of course, be voted absurd to imbecility to talk of the good faith of a savage, but it proves at least that Cetewayo is not anxious to precipitate a war, that we are able to rest in such perfect security, not much more than thirty miles from the border of Zululand. Our little garrison barely numbers six hundred all told, and the Zulus, we hear, mass themselves in such immense numbers, and assemble so rapidly at a given point, that if Cetewayo were to be seized with the desire to march about

twenty thousand of his picked warriors upon our completely exposed camp some night (which, they say, he would be well able to do), I am afraid that, however gallant our defence might be, there would be very few of us left to tell the tale in the morning.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Utrecht,
June 2.

THE wild gaiety of last week being now unhappily a thing of the past, we have returned to our social torpor, and dissipation of all sorts may be considered beyond the reach of the dweller in Utrecht for another year at least. He can drink, it is true, any description of liquor (nominally), from champagne to bottled beer, at fabulous prices, provided he likes to pay for it—and even this is a solace denied to the inhabitants of some of these out-of-the-way villages. A friend who has been quartered at Kokstadt assures us that, during the few months he has been there, although there are two or three stores, nothing in the shape of intoxicating liquor is to be bought in the whole place. It was a gala day for Kokstadt, when a

ship, having gone ashore on the coast some miles off, a whole cargo of spirits was brought up by wagons to the town, and I can easily believe that both soldiers and civilians were "on spree" for at least three days after.

But when a soldier has to pay eightpence for his pint of beer, he is apt to look about him for some description of beverage that will go a little further for the money; and he is well advised if, in spite of the embargo which is laid upon it, he does not betake himself to the consumption of the white brandy which is sold under the name of "Cape smoke." This abomination, which is adulterated—some say, chiefly compounded of paraffin—is a poison calculated to burn the inside out of a rhinoceros; and only a short time ago two of the men died from drinking it within twenty-four hours of each other!

The Kafirs are said to be able to drink these very ardent spirits with comparative impunity, but if a white man drinks them to intoxication, he runs a poor chance of ever regaining his sober senses in this world; and in the case of the last unfortunate victim, though every conceivable effort was made to save him, violent inflammation,

followed by congestion, set in, and he died after twenty-four hours' sufferings, which the doctor describes as appalling to witness.

Since that terrible warning, a perfect change has come o'er the camp; even the social "tot" of rum is neglected by the soldier, and there is such a run upon the mildly invigorating ginger beer, as to prove to the astonished canteen-sergeant that teetotalism is for the moment in the ascendant.

But, although dissipation is not to be had at Utrecht, visiting of the very mildest and most domestic kind is within the reach of those of us who care to indulge in it, as I discovered to my cost, in the course of a conversation with our excellent grocer and pork-butcher, the other day. Anxious to escape, with all possible politeness, the necessity of purchasing an unusually atrocious outrage upon the fashions of last year's gowns, I said, with what I now realize to have been a mendacity richly meriting punishment—

"Surely, Mr. A—— B——, it would be an absolute sin to wear such an uncommonly fine gown here, where there is no one to see it?"

"Ah! you do not consider *us* anybody, I know," responded honest A—— B——, whom,

I was horrified to see, conceived himself wounded in an especially tender point. "Mrs. A—— B—— *had* promised herself the pleasure of calling at your tents, but I always told her you English ladies are so proud, that she had better not intrude."

At this moment, sitting all alone in my own tent, I protest I blush up to my eyes when I recollect this speech of poor A—— B——; and a blush is only another name for apoplexy in this climate.

"Oh, Mr. A—— B——," I cried, summoning to my aid that graceful *savoir-faire*, of which the true Briton has always a stock in reserve for similar dilemmas, "pride has nothing to do with it. Quite absurd, of course. I'm sure we should all be charmed. So very nice to see Mrs. A—— B——. But,"—driven to distraction by the bitter smile with which our aggrieved stores-man whipped a couple of his best gowns off the counter, and shut up a gorgeous bonnet with a smack like a Jack-in-the-box—"I never thought —did not expect, I mean—that is, things are so different in different countries"—(A—— B—— is a Dutchman)—"and at home it is, as you say,

not the custom. Nothing could be nicer, as you say; but still it is not the custom." And for the life of me, I could think of nothing better than to go on repeating this phrase over and over again, while I felt myself to be rapidly, and I believe visibly, dissolving before the eyes of the incensed—but, I vow, unjustly incensed—grocer, till there was nothing left for me but to retire to my tent, cloaked and covered with confusion.

Since then, several days have elapsed, and I have been gradually cooling, like an extinct volcano; but I have recognized the necessity of transferring our insignificant custom to the store of C—— D——, over the way; and the apparition of Mrs. A—— B——, in *the* bonnet (I should know it amongst a thousand), in opposite corners of the laager, has brought home to me the fact that the doors of Utrecht society are closed, by my unlucky inadvertence, against me, and me only, for ever.

But though this deplorable slip has placed us out of the pale of society in Utrecht proper, my husband and I have made the acquaintance of one of the farmers in the neighbourhood; and it was not without curiosity that I paid my first visit to

his house, as I wished to see for myself what the *ménage* of a Dutch Boer was really like.

Not that good Mr. Smutz called himself a Boer; for some reason or other, he declined the appellation—whether because he thought it stank at the present time in English nostrils, or for some less unpatriotic reason, I do not know.

"I Dopper," he would say, when questioned as to his dignities and titles. "Plenty money I. Old Smutz buy up any one of you; buy up the whole lot of you. Come and see me one of these days. One come; all come over to my little place, and see old Smutz."

It would have been impossible to have refused an invitation given with so much grace and cordiality; and, as a matter of course, the officers of both regiments spent many a spare afternoon at old Smutz's homestead, discussing politics—*i.e.* the all-absorbing theme of annexation—with the worthy Dopper, and partaking of the eminently (to a stranger) nauseating "square-all," tempered with aniseed, which is the favourite beverage of the Boers. Dopper Smutz having extended his hospitality to me in no less gracious a manner, it was arranged that I should "go over to his

little place, and make acquaintance with the vrouw," though, as I was given to understand that she could speak no English, and as the only Dutch word I could speak, or even knew the meaning of, was *mitterseele*, which signifies "parsley," there did not seem much prospect of improving the acquaintance beyond the point when it could be carried on by nods and becks and wreathed smiles.

Dopper Smutz's little place lay under a hill some eight miles to the west of Utrecht, and is a very good example of a well-to-do Dutch farm, the well-to-doness being evidenced by a whole army of idle, grinning Kafir men and women, who stand staring and exhibiting their white teeth, without a thought of offering their services, when you ride up and dismount at the door. At the threshold you are usually met by the Dopper himself. If he is not at home, you must walk in and salute the lady of the house, who will probably be found within, watching your arrival from her seat on a corner of the sofa. She holds out her hand, but does not get up as you enter, and this conduct probably gives rise to a surmise on your part, that either she has no legs, like the Queen

of Spain, or has lost the use of them—unless you are acquainted with the fact that Dutch etiquette requires that she should keep her seat till the proper ceremonies of introduction and hand-shaking have been performed.

These happily over, our hostess recovers her powers of locomotion rapidly enough, and bustles about with an alacrity that is pretty sure to astonish the European visitor—seeing that the good lady is seldom known to attain a weight much under twelve stone, with a waist circumference of some thirty-six inches—setting before the guest cake, of which there always seems to be one newly smoking from the oven, and coffee, so inscrutably sickly and sweet that, after tasting it, one feels that the good lady's *embonpoint* is half accounted for already. In a Dutch house—the part of it, that is, in which the visitor is received—everything is so smart and bright, so preternaturally spick and span, that you feel as if you had made some mistake, and squeezed yourself into a doll's house.

At Dopper Smutz's, the walls were pink, the door was blue, and there were ornamentations all about, of indescribable patterns and hues. There

were resplendent chairs, on which it was obvious that no one but company ever sat, books that were never opened, glittering fire-irons that were never used unless it was to poke the garlands of greenery in the grate, and a musical box on the table, which boasted of three tunes, one being "Home, Sweet Home," which the worthy Dopper religiously wound up, and kept in play during the whole of the visit, with a hazy impression, I believe, that he was thereby paying us a sort of delicate national compliment.

Conversation in a Dutch homestead (when it is capable of being carried on at all), turns, as in most countries between the ladies, mainly on household and domestic matters. It would be a grave breach of decorum should the visitor omit to inquire after the junior branches of the family, as particularly as she is qualified to do by previous acquaintance. If there is no acquaintance, a vague question as to the well-being of the family is admissible, and in using the word "family" it is well to make it as plural as possible, for there is pretty sure to be a perfect forest of olive branches gathered round the good lady's table. A round dozen of young Boers is rather under

than over the fashionable number, less than five or six constituting quite a curiously small family, in fact, almost a "disappointment."

While these confidences are being exchanged between the ladies, the gentlemen contrive to engage the host in a discussion on political affairs —no easy matter with the wary Boer; in fact, a simply impossible matter, when the Boer is such a supremely wary one as our friend Smutz, who, when the discourse verges on topics that are apt to call forth opinions in the least compromising, takes refuge in a sudden inability to comprehend the language, and refuses, with stolid perseverance, to understand the very words that a moment ago were coming so trippingly off his own proper tongue.

"You would know what I tink?" he will say, shaking his great heavy head, and frowning, till his red little pig's eyes disappear into twinkling points of light. "Ah, but I have not de language. Have one more leetle glass of square-all, gentlemen. I support de Boers in a rising, rebellion—how do you call it? You see, I speak so vera, vera leetle English, and Mrs. Smutz, she speak it not at all."

This was the truth; but Mrs. Smutz possessed a daughter, who had spent some months, I suppose, in "the city," at a boarding school which had turned her out after a pattern wonderfully resembling that frequently seen at home. By her aid in interpretation, Mrs. Smutz and I were enabled to exchange ideas on the scarcity of butter, and the correct number of eggs in a cake; and at the end of half an hour we adjourned to the garden, where, by dint of pointing and making signs, I was able to purchase as many vegetables as set us up in that line for a week at least.

The good Dopper could, with difficulty, be prevailed upon to accept more than a mere nominal price for his cabbages, assuring us that he was a rich man, and could buy us all up, and had no wish to make money out of us. Oranges were brought in, gathered from the trees outside, and after we had eaten as many as we could, and stuffed our pockets with the remainder, water was brought to us to wash our fingers in a lovely china bowl.

The same ceremonies were observed on our departure, as before; the vrouw, however, ex-

tending her hand with a certain hesitation, which caused me to suspect that a somewhat warmer method of leave-taking is in vogue amongst the *élite* in these parts. The etiquette of Dutch houses is, I am told, extremely strict, but, of course, any little oversights on our part are excused on the ground of our being foreigners. Mrs. Smutz did her best to set us straight on many little points, and, on my turning to shake hands with her at taking leave, motioned me *first* towards the Dopper, with an air that clearly showed that no amount of consideration for the ignorance of a stranger to Boer etiquette could induce her to take precedence of her husband on such an occasion.

Five minutes more, and we are being helped on to our horses by the now zealous and bustling Kafir "boys" (a Kafir is a boy here, even though he may have attained to patriarchal years and dignities).

"Come soon," ejaculates Mrs. Smutz, instigated to this effort by the daughter, who, I believe, persuades her that she is saying good-bye; and by the time the Dopper has ceased his cheerful assurances that he is a rich man,

"plenty oxen, lots of money," the snug homestead, with its formal garden, and grove of orange trees planted in such a precise Dutch fashion, that they look hardly more picturesque than so many rows of raspberry bushes, is fast fading under the shadow of the hill.

CHAPTER XIX.

Utrecht,
June 21.

MORALIZING, for the want of anything else to do, is largely indulged in by the inmates of the laager; and amongst many others equally valuable, we often make the reflection, that for a thorough cure of the most inveterate laziness, nothing more would be required than a few weeks of the enforced idleness under which we yawn our heads off here. Persons whose profession it is to find sermons in stones, and to adorn tales with morals, might be moved to utter many pungent and stirring sentiments, could they be privileged to behold the spectacle of six or eight rational beings, with their whole attention concentrated on bringing to the highest perfection the Mephistophelian art of killing time. But, earnestly as

we all slave at this most exhausting of all hard labours, it cannot be said that we have made any very striking advances at present.

To sit all day, blankly staring at the hills through whirling clouds of dust; watching the miniature cyclones as they waltz across the veldt, picking up sticks and paper as they go, and making a perfectly absurd amount of noise; or counting the onions Mrs. Chose, or Mrs. Number Three or Four, may be putting into her soup in the corner opposite, has such a soothing effect upon the brain, that some of us are enabled to enjoy several hours' sound sleep in the afternoons; by which means a large portion of the weary day is healthfully and completely destroyed. Those who are not so fortunate are being rapidly driven to despair by the utter failure of every attempt to dissipate the *ennui* that—and I protest for no fault of our own—is threatening to smother us like a wet blanket.

Cooking—when eggs are not procurable, butter a thing of the past, and let us hope, future; sugar, only to be distinguished from the surrounding sand by the paper that it is wrapped in; and vegetables represented by a block of some

sort of conglomeration, chiefly garlic, which you must cut with a hatchet—is so entirely divested of all that makes it interesting, that we are only too willing to turn over to X—— and his compeers the stewing of our tough beef and frying of our mutton chops. In consequence of the more than scarcity of milk, eggs, and butter, there has been a great run upon suet-puddings of all descriptions; and Mrs. Beeton has been in such request to furnish suggestions for varying these dull dumplings, that I really am thinking of having her chained to the tent-pole, as they used to chain the Bibles to the desks in days of yore; I'm sure I could turn many an honest (?) penny, by selling copies of some of the most approved recipes—I do not believe there is another cookery book in the whole place.

The very passable fare that we do manage, by taking a good deal of trouble, to obtain here, seems to throw into stronger relief than ever the miserable incapacity and negligence of English cooks. There is hardly a cottage at home—in fact, there is no cottage, that can boast of anything in the shape of a grate, that does not possess means of preparing a comfortable dinner, far

beyond anything that we can attain to with our holes and trenches in the ground, and our three-legged iron pot. The words of the Prodigal Son, "How many hired servants of my father's," etc., are often in our minds, as we are baffled in one attempt after another to concoct some tolerably appetizing little dish, by the total impossibility of getting materials. I have eaten many a roly-poly, in establishments where a staff of kitchen-maids is kept, far inferior to those I manufacture here, rolling out the paste on a dish with the pickle bottle, and kneeling on the ground to make it, for lack of a kitchen table.

The vivid contrasts which are to be drawn between our condition and that of the spoiled domestics at home, affords many of the servants here, and notably X——, a sort of bitter consolation, and he is never tired of dilating upon this theme.

"I doubt, ma'am," he will say to me, at times when the wind causes our *rôt* to be taken up—a cinder on one side and raw on the other—or when a sudden cloud of sand compels us to pour out our soup for a libation upon the ground, instead of eating it—"I doubt it would do some

of them fine cooks at home a power of good, if they had to send up a dinner, and only our conveniences to cook it with."

"And it would do no harm to some of their masters and mistresses if they had to eat it afterwards," I generally make answer. "And eat it too with a three-pronged steel fork, like those we use here every day of our lives." (Nobody knows how difficult it is to eat with a steel fork until he has tried. The way in which we stabbed our cheeks, and the bad shots we made at our mouths, on first attempting it, are things never to be forgotten.) "There is not a beggar in England," I generally conclude, when sufficiently warmed to the subject, "who is not a thousand times better off than we. For if the worst comes to the worst with him, he has always a comfortable workhouse to go to."

"Yes," rejoins X——, "and a good bed and sheets to sleep in when he gets there"—sheets being at this moment to most of us a type of almost Babylonish luxury and indulgence.

It is but within the last few weeks that, having bought a bedstead for the sum of five shillings, I ventured, almost with conscientious misgivings,

to bring to light a pair of these (at home considered) indispensable articles; and there are plenty of men up here who have not slept in a bed for between two and three years. I do not believe that any amount of experience would enable me to conquer my excessive dislike to sleeping on the ground, and I took to my five-shilling bed when I had a chance, with such a perfectly rapturous sense of enjoyment (even though it was in such a rickety state that it could only be approached with much caution and many creaks), that it was quite difficult to persuade myself that there was not something wrong and wickedly self-indulgent in having it.

Cooking, as one of the fine arts, being altogether impracticable in the laager, the natural instincts of the British matron would lead her to fall back upon needlework for an occupation. But here the selfsame obstacle at once opposes itself, viz., the impossibility of buying even a yard of respectable calico, and the ridiculous prices of such materials as are to be had. It is quite enough to keep your clothes in repair when you have to give one sixpence for a reel of cotton, and another for a packet of needles,

half eyeless, half pointless, and all rusty, and with no emery powder come-at-able nearer than "the city."

In the complete despair to which such a condition of things had reduced us, it was proposed a short time ago by some one, more reckless than the rest, to undertake a picnic to some waterfalls about six miles from here—as if we ever did anything else than picnic every day of our lives in Utrecht, and as if we could have appreciated any other picnic than that which could be enjoyed with our feet under the polished mahogany, and a French roll and a silver fork in our hands. Nevertheless, a picnic was proposed, and we all took part in it, and set out on the expedition—a strong party of fourteen, mounted on all the screws, ponies, and old artillery horses that could by any means be pressed into the service. The civil element was represented by Mr. Henrique Shepstone, whose two tents had been for some days pitched in the village, and whose amusing descriptions of his travels in England, and impressions of life in "the Island," helped us to forget the exhausting heat and fatigue, which are the most salient points of a day's "pleasuring" out here.

Our lunch was taken out in the mule-wagon, and was eaten by the side of a stream under the mimosa trees, amidst all the discomforts proper to similar occasions.

The meal over, those of us who had still energy or spirits to spare, set off up-stream in search of ferns, and a couple of irrepressibles, of whom my husband was one, shouldered their guns, and climbed a neighbouring hill, from the top of which we could hear an old baboon defying us with his short, hoarse barks. For my part, I was well contented to sit by the side of the "spruit," and listen to the interesting account given by Mr. Shepstone of a tour he had recently made amongst the Boers, on business connected with the settlement of the boundary question.

From what he told us, the customs of these good people would seem to be the most primitive possible, and they are so perfectly accustomed to travelling about in wagons, with whole families crowded together, *à la Noah's ark*, that the utmost freedom and sociability obtains; and the idea that it would be possible to intrude at any time upon the privacy of a guest, could no more be knocked into their heads than it could into that of Paul Pry.

It was most laughable to hear the description of the sufferings of a shy fellow-traveller (who was unacquainted with the customs of the Transvaal), under the too polite attentions of his hosts; those of the lovely young Boeresses especially. The quite Oriental fashion of washing the feet of the guests, which he was required to submit to in one Dutch farmhouse, almost annihilated the modest self-possession of this poor gentleman, and his confusion was increased by the attentions which the daughters of the house insisted upon showing him when the moment arrived for retiring for the night. But the extremest limit of his powers of endurance was overpassed when, next morning, before he had risen from his bed, two or three beautiful damsels strolled carelessly into his room, their toilettes in various stages of incompleteness, and began to arrange their hair in front of the only piece of looking-glass which happened to be in the house. At this spectacle, the guest is said to have been perfectly paralyzed by a complete agony of shyness, and when an opportunity arrived, he made his escape from the too hospitable house, and insisted on remaining *perdu* in the wagon during the remainder of the visit.

From what we can gather from other sources, it would seem that the habits of the Boers appear to the very greatest disadvantage when contrasted with those of the scrupulously clean and (by comparison) refined Zulu Kafirs. With the exception of the reception-room, and perhaps the guest-chamber, dirt of the most revolting description is but too apt to form the most salient feature of a Dutch farm in the Transvaal; and from personal experience, I can testify that in many instances the habits of the inmates are a fit match for the untidiness and horribly filthy state of these establishments.

All pleasant days come to an end, and so do all tedious ones at last; and, but for the regret we felt at the termination of so much interesting discourse, I think we hailed with resignation the arrival of the hour fixed for the ride home, and were really almost pleased when we saw the low wall of the laager rising out of the veldt, and realized that our spasmodic attempt to spend "a 'appy day" was already a thing of the past.

CHAPTER XIX.

Berghers' Pass,
July 4.

We are now in the beginning of winter, and are suffering from a degree of cold that I, in my ignorance, never dreamed of experiencing in South Africa. The nights are becoming most severe; and in the morning one has to break the ice that has formed in our buckets during the night. Tents not being precisely calculated for extreme weather of either kind, we set to work with bricks and mortar to build a wall about eighteen inches high, in the inside circumference of the tent, with a fire-place and chimney, and hoped to be able to forget, in looking at the cheerful face of a coal fire, that there was nothing but canvas between us and the frost. The pole of the tent being raised, the flap hung over the wall, thus enabling us to gain con-

siderably in interior space, while at the same time keeping out the draughts and cold. The chimney, being carried along the ground, rose almost to the level of the top of the tent, and had a very important and homelike appearance, though perhaps, in the matter of carrying off the smoke, it was not quite all that could be desired. This brilliant idea (and for those whose fate it is to be dwellers under canvas in variable climates, it is a wrinkle well worth knowing) originated with the 13th Light Infantry, who are quartered at Pretoria, and was expounded to us by one of them, who was dining with us in our then comfortless tent a short time ago. My husband and I were the first to be seized with the building fever, which has since proved as contagious as it is wont to be in more advanced countries, and walls and foundations, and even quite Norman-looking round towers, with droll little windows about a foot square, are to be seen rising like mushrooms in every corner of the laager.

Coal of a very fair quality is plentiful in the neighbouring hills, and is to be had for nothing except the trouble of fetching it. It lies close to the surface, and can be easily extracted with a

pick and spade. The mineral wealth of this place, in the shape of iron, lies, as it does with us, in a compact space with coal. Labour (and the Kafir is a powerful labourer when sharply looked after) could be had for the hiring; and with capital, British energy, and improved communication with the coast, it would be impossible to form any estimate of the extent to which the magnificent resources of the country might be developed.

The climate as at present existing is utterly inimical to agricultural enterprise, in spite of the flowery advertisements in the home papers of farms in the Transvaal, with any amount of square miles attached to them, of virgin soil. The soil is sand; there are no preparations for facing the droughts, which last, as is the case at the present moment, for a couple of years at a time; and the hot wind from the desert, with the showers of parching sand that come with it, literally scorch the struggling attempts at vegetation as if they had been exposed to the blast of a hot oven.

The future of the Transvaal lies in its mineral deposits, and when the day arrives which shall see South Africa feeding the ships that fill her ports with coal drawn from the vast stores, now

hidden in the virgin bosom of her hills, the whole country will start into activity, and will shake off the drowsy languor under which it seems at present to lie dreaming.

The Zulu Kafir, too, is clearly the possessor of capabilities which distinguish him from all other races of his black brethren. He has characteristics and stamina which are entirely peculiar to himself, and which are not to be found either in the indolent Asiatic, or the frivolous and shallow typical African nigger. The bracing cold of his hilly districts has a markedly invigorating effect upon his powerful frame, and while he is confessedly far superior to the white man in physique, he is not far behind him in the intellectual expression of his countenance, or the capacity of his well-shaped head. The Kafir is an apt linguist, and there are but few amongst those who are brought into contact with the whites who cannot in a few months make themselves readily understood both in Dutch and English. Besides these characteristics, the Zulu possesses a natural pride and dignity (for which those who have never seen him hardly give him sufficient credit)—peculiarities which may help to account in no

slight degree for the unfortunate reluctance of the Zulu king to submit to foreign dictation in the management of his home and domestic policy.

I have now, if possible, more idle time on my hands than ever, and it ought, I really think, to serve as an excuse for any amount of additional prosiness.

Yesterday my husband and I shifted our quarters again, and are now perched in a sort of eagle's nest half-way up one of the hills about seven miles to the east of Utrecht. G—— has been sent out to relieve one of the captains who has been here for the last ten days, making a road over which the troops may one day go into Zululand. We had not more than an hour or two's notice to put together our few traps, cooking things, and tents, which were bundled off on the mule-wagon belonging to the 80th regiment, while I followed, being escorted by some of the officers, later in the afternoon.

The road to be made, or rather improved upon, goes almost perpendicularly up the face of the mountain, where the men are at work getting out big rocks, and making it as smooth as is possible considering the rough implements they

have to use. It is rather slow work, as they have no blasting-powder, and the great stones have to be hacked and hammered underneath and prized up with crowbars and planks, and my husband is obliged to be with them all day superintending.

This is certainly one of the most lovely spots I have ever seen. Our couple of tents are pitched on a platform half-way up one of the hills, where we are protected from the full force of the wind, and have splendid shade (such a treat!) from the mimosa trees, which here attain the size of acacia trees at home. The view from our tents is really grand, and the air has a delicious freshness, quite *champagny*, about it, like a sea-side breeze at home. From beneath the branches of the mimosa, where we take our meals, we have a glorious view right away to the mountains behind Newcastle, and all the plain between, with Utrecht and the two camps (ours and the 80th) lying broiling in the sun, and the road winding like a white clue in a maze in and out amongst the bush, so that in this clear atmosphere we can see visitors approaching three or four miles off. These headless African hills, with their strange pyramidal outlines, have a boldness and even grandeur peculiarly their

own; and the rich bush, which here clothes them to the summit, imparts deliciously tender depths and shadows, which take off from that wild, desolate look that is so marked a feature of the country.

Nothing strikes us so forcibly here as the silence—the total absence of all that hum of distant life that it is almost impossible to escape from at home. It is always Sunday, and more than Sunday, here. The stillness is unbroken save by the feeble chirping of the birds, the screech of the Kafirs as they call to one another from the hills, and the hoarse bark of the baboons in the woods.

Those said baboons are a source of the liveliest uneasiness to Mr. X——, who is certain that he has heard authentic accounts of their assembling in troops and attacking a camp by night; and as our particular camp only consists of X——'s tent and his master's (the company's tents being pitched right out of sight and hearing, round a shoulder of the hill), he is very properly persuaded that we should stand a poor chance against the onslaught of a few regiments of them! The celerity with which these savage brutes scuttle away and hide in the bush on the first symptoms

of pursuit is, of course, only a proof of their extraordinary cunning; and once "attackted" by them (which is not a much more improbable supposition than the children's ideas about putting salt on birds' tails), according to X——, brandy won't save you, seeing that you are in the clasp of a creature which can give you a hug equal to that of an octopus or a gorilla, and which is goodness knows how many feet high. Such a danger impending, naturally calls for unceasing vigilance on the part of our trusty henchman, who goes to bed regularly with his loaded rifle by his side, and informs me that he has not closed an eye for I should be afraid to say how many nights past.

X—— and I spend many hours together alone in our little camp; but if I were the most timid lady breathing, I could not feel a shadow of nervousness with such a doughty champion at hand. Only two days ago, when I was trying to sketch the breast-high wall and arrangement of stones and sticks called by courtesy our kitchen, I beheld X——, after listening and looking all round for a moment, suddenly drop the spoon with which he was perfecting some culinary experiment, and hurry into his tent at "the double,"

lumbago and sciatica notwithstanding; and on hastening to him, I found him ramming a charge into his rifle with a sort of "do or die" expression contracting his saturnine features, which at once prepared me for the worst.

"Heavens, X——!" I cried, "what is going to happen now? Is it the Zulus come at last?"

"It's not the Zulus, ma'am, but it's one of them great big 'bahboos'" (for so X—— calls them) "creeping about up there among the rocks. I see him hiding himself plain enough, but if so be as he should come within range" (the rocks being about a hundred yards off, but no matter!) "I'll have a shot at him, dashed if I don't! They tell me as them great beasts get terrible fierce and savage if they be attackted, but I'd like to have a shot at him if he comes here, anyhow!" And X—— buttoned up his countenance in a fashion that showed me he was resolved to sell his life dearly, at any rate.

"You are right," I answered with corresponding firmness; "but what do you think of the bayonet, if he should come to close quarters? Who knows what may happen? Then there is the ammunition. I suppose you are not particular

to a round or two? On second thoughts, had you not better take the revolver?"

"As to the ammunition, ma'am," said X—— (and I could not but fancy I detected a gleam of humour on his sardonic countenance), "when it's used in the *defence of my life*, they can't say nothing to me! and when we *have* got the rifle handy, I don't think they revolvers is much good when you really want to hit anything."

This appeared to be the opinion the old baboon entertained with regard to rifles, for he very leisurely climbed up the rocks and over the edge of the hill, uttering a few short barks as he vanished, and X—— had to return very hot and breathless from his scramble over the stones, without ever having been able to furnish me with a proof of his skill as a marksman, though on the score of his valour I could not fail to be amply satisfied.

Most of our hairbreadth adventures and escapes ended similarly in smoke—at least, not in smoke, for few of them got as far as that, but in the loading of X——'s rifle; and as the revolver was always hanging to the tent-pole ready for action, I was kept in such a state of

apprehension that I had hardly any terrors to spare for the arrival of the baboons or any other beasts that might pay us a visit.

In short, the shooting of all kinds, to which my husband had been looking forward, was a complete delusion, and the game, with which we were told the hills abounded, consisted of one deer, which seemed half tame, and used to stand on a rock and gaze at me when G—— had gone to his work. It displayed marvellous self-possession too on the occasion of *my* preparing to have a shot at it, and did not seem half so much scared as an "orderly," who had been sent out from Utrecht, and who evidently suspected me of suicidal intentions.

Baboons were not the only cause of alarm in our camp. Formidable snakes lay coiled up under the rocks; scorpions, which X—— took a sort of fiendish delight in impaling, frequented the stones of our fireplace; and a mysterious something used to come at night and eat up the remains of our dinner. From a quill which we picked up, we should have supposed it to have been a porcupine, if it had not been that X——, who heard its stealthy footsteps in the night, and

who refused to go out, though armed with his rifle, knew it to be a lion or a tiger.

In spite of the want of life, which is a great drawback to South African scenery, these apparently barren hills are in reality the homes of hundreds of Kafirs, whose kraals are so artfully concealed in the "khloofs" and bush, that at first we, as strangers, supposed ourselves to be alone in the wilderness. This romantic illusion was rudely dispelled one day, when I heard a loud war-cry overhead, and, looking up, perceived a Kafir, who, armed with shield and sheaf of light assegais, was violently shrieking and gesticulating on the summit of the crag. Instantly the cry was taken up from the opposite hill, and before I had time to recover from my astonishment, the whole valley re-echoed with shouts.

The explanation of this mystery soon presented itself in the shape of a Kafir, who, fully armed, seemed, like the warriors of Roderick Dhu, to spring out of the ground at my elbow. But as this gentleman was only able to express himself by signs and gesticulations, I supposed him to be begging for "scoff," * which I offered him, and

* Bread, *Anglicè*.

which he sat down to consume, postponing, as is their manner, his urgent business till he had satisfied his hunger. This was such a lengthy affair, that long before it was over he was joined by four or five more, all fully armed, all gesticulating violently, and all subsiding into tranquillity at the exhibition of "scoff."

As, however, a Kafir's appetite is by no means a thing to be trifled with, and as I saw no reason why these self-invited guests should not be arriving in continuous detachments, I ran up to the camp for an interpreter, and when the clamour occasioned by their all addressing him at once was in some degree subdued, I was able by his aid to elucidate the mystery. They were Kafir policemen from Utrecht, who, *infra dig.* though it may sound, were in pursuit of a couple of British soldiers who had deserted from the camp. These unfortunates were at this very moment climbing painfully down the rocks, their halting gait contrasting vividly with the light and active step of their captors. They were painfully jaded and worn, and looked almost ready to faint with hunger and fatigue, as they stumbled into camp amidst the rapidly augmenting crowd of exultant Kafirs.

This little incident, though of no importance in itself, was an illustration of the rapidity with which Kafirs can concentrate on a given point, even in the roughest country, and their dark skin makes them so difficult to distinguish from the bush, that until they are actually on the spot, you would not suppose yourself to be within miles of them.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Marble Hall, Utrecht,
August 25.

ONCE more back in dusty Utrecht, and extremely sorry to have been obliged to leave our beautiful perch, and give up "gipsying" amongst the hills. I brought down with me a fine collection of ferns, which grew under the big stones on all the slopes facing north, and my husband shot a few specimens of the brilliant-plumaged birds that flashed amongst the bush and plunged their slender bills into the huge bunches of scarlet flowers that grew on the curiously dead-looking, leafless trees.

For the last few days up there, however, the cold had been unendurable; snow had even fallen, and had withstood the melting powers of the sun for two or three days, imparting to the hills quite homelike effects, which we never expected to have seen in South Africa.

But, refreshing as it was to be able to fancy ourselves for a moment in England, the illusion, unluckily, did not carry us so far as to make us imagine ourselves inside substantial walls, and sitting in front of a glowing fire, with a good sheet of plate-glass instead of a thin canvas, between us and the cold. And it is marvellous how unexhilarating is even the most bracing cold, when it has to be encountered in a tent like a sieve, with the moon and stars beautifully visible overhead, and through which the wind sweeps as it listeth, ruffling your hair as you lie in bed.

It is distinctly *not* amusing, but, on the contrary, to the last degree dreadful and depressing, to have to lie in bed to get warm, and, finding that fail, to have to get up to avoid being frozen; to have to sit in a tent like a wet rag, with all your clothes as wet as if (in laundry parlance) they had been "damped for ironing," with the utter impossibility of drying them staring you in the face. It is *not* inspiriting to know that nothing except the suspension of the ordinary laws of cause and effect can save you from an attack of ague or rheumatic fever; to have your chair, your bed-

stead, anything that unsuspectedly touches the tent, turned straightway into a channel for the conduction of a miniature waterspout; to strike your head against the tent, and bring a perfect shower-bath upon your clothes, which will have to dry of their own accord—when the sun comes out, probably in a day or two!—to have no lunch, because the snow and rain have put the fire out; to make your dinner off watery stew, plus any amount of grease; and, moreover, to have to eat the said stew out of its native stew-pan, because the state of the weather renders any attempt at "dishing up" ridiculous.

If any very young person should be misled by a fervid imagination into fancying that such a life has a savour of romantic wildness and freedom about it calculated to compensate to those of a romantic turn for the absence of mere material comforts, let him take a tent, and let him pitch it —say, for instance—in the Regent's Park, about the beginning of December, and, provided next winter resembles in any degree the last, he will have very cheaply purchased an appreciation of all the comfortable conventionalities of life that will last him to his dying day.

Since our return to Utrecht, it is not the cold that we have been martyrs to, but the dust. Oh, the hours that those sandstorms blow day after day! and oh, the unspeakable griminess and grittiness of everything get-at-able, clothes and provisions included! All day long a sort of dull red cloud seems sweeping across the veldt, and an incessant storm of hot sand, that cuts into your face and eyes like needles, hails down upon the tent. The wind, too, which is hot and parching to an extraordinary degree, does not seem to come in puffs and gusts, as it does at home, but in one continuous, unbroken blast, that makes you feel quite out of breath to hear it. Everything taken up from the table leaves a perfect representation of itself, printed in the dust, which has collected round it, though it may not have been lying there more than five minutes or so; and from time to time, sand will pour in at the door of the tent, which is always, of course, rigidly laced and closed, as if some one were emptying it out of a funnel. Everything eatable has to be brought to table in a covered saucepan, and even the teapot, at such times, appears with a little hood of linen to protect the spout.

The air, too, appears to get almost intolerably dry and burning. Our skins regularly seem to peel away, and our hands have cracks and chaps in them, as in the coldest weather at home. The few treasures the white ants left us have been entirely ruined by several weeks of this weather—books of all kinds warping out of all recognition, even though kept in drawers; and the ivory cases of my opera-glasses splitting into a hundred pieces, until there is nothing left of them to hold the lenses together. The incessant noise and flapping of the tent is wearying beyond belief, and the bulging and motion of it make one feel almost as if one were on a ship, watching the sails; some people even going so far, as to say that it makes them sea-sick.

This was uncomfortable enough, and a few weeks' experience of such discomforts determined us to look about for some means of putting a roof over our heads, even if it should be no better than a barn.

A barn, indeed, was the proper designation for the only quarters that offered, being two perfectly bare, unpapered rooms in a thatched cottage, standing almost in the camp, which had

been hitherto in the occupation of Captain Moriarty, of the 80th,* and his wife. The owner of the cottage, an old Dutchman, named Maritz, lives in the other half of it, and upon the 80th being ordered to Pretoria, my husband and I succeeded to the rooms, into which we removed our very few goods and chattels on September 3. Although we have no carpet on the floor, and only whitewashed walls, and a thatched roof guiltless of ceiling, we revel in being able to shut out the sand that we see blowing for hours together through the camp, and congratulate ourselves, at the thought of having a roof of some sort between us and the weather, with a feeling of luxurious content, to which the typical "prince in his palace" is a stranger.

We did not escape from the laager, though, without a taste of the thunderstorms, which we had been told were so severe in these districts. About a week before we left we had a regular semi-tropical storm of wind and rain. It had been pouring steadily for some hours previously, and about 9 p.m., as we were sitting by the fire, we heard a noise in the distance, as if whole troops

* Since killed at Intombe.

of horses were galloping over the veldt. After listening to it for a moment—"That is the rain," I said to my husband, and almost at the same instant the tent was struck by a blast, with a regular roar like a cannon, while down came the rain with perfectly awful force on the tent, which, of course, tightened in a few minutes, till we thought every peg must have been pulled out of the ground. The great drops sounded on the straining canvas like peas on a drumhead, and the wind kept up such an incessant roar that, if we had not shouted, my husband and I could not have heard each other speak. The bulging of the tent was such that we expected the pole to come down every moment. G—— held on to it with all his might, while I stood near the door, to be ready in case of contingencies. But luckily, in spite of the weight of water on it, the tent stood well, though our walls were rapidly crumbling away under the influence of small waterspouts in divers places.

The storm lasted about twenty minutes, and G—— then went out to see how our other tents stood. Our sleeping-tent had weathered the storm marvellously well, but our little maid's

tent had had all the pegs torn out on one side, and the pole was leaning over at a considerable angle. Inside, everything was soaking —bed, clothes, all, wringing wet. But other people were in still worse case; the hospital and library marquees were blown clean away, and the water was running like a sluice through the company-tents, which were pitched on a sloping part of the camp. We had to be extremely thankful that we were able, after half an hour's work re-making our bed and pouring the water out of our boots like buckets, to find a corner that was only damp wherein to sleep, and not to have to spend the night sitting on an island of luggage, and watching the water run through the tent, as not unfrequently happens here, to the dwellers under canvas, during the rainy season.

In this cottage we are housed, to the envy of those we have left behind us in the laager. It is true that we have no carpets, and almost as little furniture, but the few "sticks" we have, are above high water-mark, and consist of a couple of tables, and what upholsterers term "an elegant sufficiency of chairs," namely, two wooden ones,

which we hire, although we are, if we choose, privileged to buy them cheap, at a trifling outlay of a pound apiece.

The only addition to our household gods which we have lately permitted ourselves to make, consists of a very handsome teapot, constructed on artistic principles, out of the purest block-tin, and which we purchased dirt-cheap at the store for seven shillings and sixpence—though X—— says he has heard of people being known sometimes to pick such things up at home for even a less sum than half a crown. For ornamental purposes, no teapot could be more eminently suited, but, of course, so choice an article was never intended for coarse domestic uses, which was doubtless the reason why the spout came off the first time we tried it, and the handle the second; but that is the case with most of the manufactured goods and hardware imports from home. All are evidently more fitted for decorative than useful purposes, for which first, as I have said, they are in general admirably designed.

Besides ourselves, the "Marble Hall," * as it is

* Christened the "Marble Hall," not from its interior luxuries and comforts, but from the dazzling nature of its whitewashed walls.

sarcastically designated by envious sojourners in the camp, is occupied, as I said, by our landlord and his wife—a couple of inoffensive old people, who inhabit a few rooms at the opposite end of the house.

Although quiet enough themselves, they are for days at a time besieged by hosts of their descendants, to the third and fourth generations, who arrive in all sorts of tilted vans and wagons, and fill the little house, creating a perfect din of screaming and conversation, till we feel as if we had taken a lodging in the neighbourhood of the Tower of Babel!

At such times, the poor old gentleman himself is regularly crowded out, and is obliged to take refuge on the bench beside his door, or spend half an hour in our (comparatively) quiet sitting-room, where he sits in his broad-brimmed hat, leaning, like Jacob, upon his staff, and, shaking his head, sadly enunciates from time to time the sentiment that "Life is full of ter-rubble. Ah, my goodness! Nothing but ter-rubble!" winding up generally by pulling a couple of oranges out of his pocket, and presenting them to me on taking leave.

Mr. Maritz, being connected with the landrost of the town, we are sometimes honoured by a call from this gentleman, when we receive a great deal of information about the Zulus, and exchange views respecting the military and political prospects of the country. It is a great relief to find in this wilderness a man so agreeable and well-informed, and differing only from a well-educated Englishman, by a very slight peculiarity of accent.

On returning his visit, we found ourselves for once in a really comfortable, well-furnished house, where the host received us at a table covered with books and papers, and reading a not more than middle-aged number of *Temple Bar*. We had quite to rub our eyes to remind ourselves that we were not in England, and it was an additional proof of the value which we set on books that, on taking our departure, I did not venture to ask for a loan of this precious volume, but went off, carrying a very dry and uninteresting tome under my arm, which nobody could set much store by.

Many were the deputies from Cetewayo who gathered round the walls of Mr. Rudolph's house,

and by no one are the peculiarities of the Kafir more thoroughly understood. Personally acquainted with the Zulu king, and in continual correspondence with him, no one is better able to give an opinion as to his future policy; and though naturally somewhat reserved as to an expression of it, we could easily gather that he did not regard a pacific settlement of the difficulties as hopeless. One of the pleasantest recollections of South Africa that we shall carry away will be that of the genial hospitality of Mr. Rudolph.

CHAPTER XXII.

Maritzburg,
October 20.

We little thought, as we were watching the dust-storms that swept the camp, and looking forward to the ripening of Mr. Maritz's peaches—a splendid crop of which was foreshadowed by the abundant blossoming of the trees in front of our house—that our next letters would be dated from Maritzburg.

That this is the case, was in consequence of a letter from the Horse Guards, which came a short month ago, ordering two officers to the depôt of the regiment, and the colonel, in complying with this command, offered my husband one of the vacancies, saying that in case of active operations there would in all probability be an opportunity of his rejoining the service companies.*

* Since this letter was written, my husband has rejoined his regiment in the field.

After much tribulation and many searchings of heart, G—— accepted the offer, and when the difficult question of making up our minds was set at rest, nothing could exceed the alacrity and excitement with which we commenced our small preparations for the homeward journey.

When the moment of departure arrived, we bade adieu to the friends left behind, with feelings in which regret largely mingled with the joy we felt at anticipations of home.

We took a tent to sleep in, and my husband's new servant (X——'s infirmities having at last compelled him to resign) was allowed to accompany us as far as Maritzburg.

All the asperities of the journey were smoothed by the kind consideration of those in authority, and it partook—as General Evelyn Wood said, in his kind parting words—"more of the nature of a pleasant picnic" than is at all wont to be the case with journeys undertaken in the ordinary course of duty in these parts.

Forty-eight hours were given us in which to complete our arrangements and to pack our furniture and belongings — not too long a

notice, considering all we had to do, but to be going home we would gladly have got ready in half the time. We moved about as if we were in a dream, and I hardly realized that in a few hours Utrecht would know us no more; even though I got up several times in the night to make quite certain that the great wagon was standing outside our door, waiting for its final load, with the driver snoring on his blanket underneath.

How many evenings had I not sat on the step beside the door, watching the stars come out above those dreary hills; and wondering if there was not one amongst them that could look down upon the dear faces at home! Already the weary months that we have spent amongst the hot sands of Utrecht seem fading away into the past of years ago; though the look of those parched, never-ending plains, with the camp spread like a white handkerchief, and the monotonous, table-hills standing round, as we used to see it from the pass, is, I feel, indelibly fixed upon my memory. I only hope that if I ever fancy myself in dreams once more at Utrecht, the view that I shall see will be the exquisite bit of colouring

which met our eyes through the little window of our Dutch cottage that looked back upon the hills. I trust that I shall always see the tall pomegranate hedge, with its scarlet waxen tassels, and glossy leaves whose myrtle darkness formed a bold but harmonious contrast with the vivid green of the young corn that was to be seen through the gaps of its luxuriant thickness, and that melted away in turn into the soft purple of the hills. Brilliant and daring as was this splendid combination of colours (gorgeous as that bit of landscape introduced into Holman Hunt's grand "Shadow of the Cross," and resembling in tone nothing else that I have ever seen), there was nothing glaring, nothing discordant in it, viewed through the softly tinted medium of the mellow African atmosphere. Even the peach trees—sturdy standards here, and not to be recognized as belonging to the same family as their sickly cousins at home, who have to be supported against a south wall, and tucked up every frosty night in bass and matting—struck no inharmonious note; they gave a delicious rosiness, almost like that of morning, as they spread everywhere their sheets of blossom, and

died away amongst the soft greens and purples like delicate pink clouds.

When the moment came, I really think our old host and hostess were sorry to part with us. The old lady embraced me, and gave me her blessing in a manner absolutely maternal; and the last person who bade us adieu was old Maritz himself, sitting on his bench in his broad-brimmed hat, and basking in the morning sun.

A few days before I left Utrecht, there was pointed out to me a man who, in the event of hostilities being declared, may become a celebrity one of these days. He was a brother of Cetewayo—not Oham, from whom a deputation to the landrost arrived the other day, and who is suspected to be not altogether unwilling to forsake the interests of his brother—but we presume some less legitimate offshoot of the royal stock, who had come to negotiate, as usual, some business matter with Mr. Rudolph. I suppose it was with a view to enhancing his dignity, and showing the progress he had personally made towards a high pitch of civilization, that he had discarded his national undress, and appeared in a battered billycock, and an old bit

of a jacket, in which he seemed a shabby-looking Kafir enough. However deceitful and treacherous they may be, there is still something very pathetic in the efforts these unfortunate savages make, by copying as best they can our dress and manners, to give themselves as they imagine an increased importance in our eyes, an additional title to our consideration and respect. It is as if they reached beyond themselves, to grasp at the fruits of what they feel dimly to be a higher civilization, as their only means of forcing us to admit their claim to a footing on that common intellectual level, which the white man ever concedes with innate reluctance to the sons of Ham.

The journey down country was marked by no special incident. We left the beaten track, and, making for the Buffalo river some miles further south, avoided the main road with its bustle of wagons and post-carts, and pursued our slow and tiresome journey by an almost obliterated route till we once more came in sight of the Biggarsberg range, lifting their rugged heads and seeming to bar our progress.

The terrible drought which had prevailed so

long had dried up many a "spruit" which on the march up had provided us with water, and the length of each day's journey was of course determined by the position of the springs. Add to this, that the country was terribly burnt up, and that the veldt, which at this season ought to have been green with the young grass, looked as if it had gone through a furnace; and it can easily be believed how much our oxen suffered, even though our wagon carried an unusually light load.

I was glad not to leave South Africa without having seen an ostrich, and a couple of wild ones, appearing and disappearing in the distance as we approached the Buffalo, created quite an excitement in our little party. A son of Mr. Maritz picked up an egg near here a short time ago; but the nests themselves are generally too carefully placed and too securely guarded by the male bird to be easily rifled. In fact, the male ostrich, like the cock pigeon, takes his full share, and often more than his share, of domestic duties—in making the nest for the hen; inducing, and if she is young and inexperienced, fairly compelling, her to sit upon it; sharing the labours of

incubation, when he reserves the night duty for himself; helping to protect and feed the young; and, in fact, doing everything except laying the eggs himself. In a semi-tame condition, the ostrich is sometimes tempted to become a bigamist, but even in that demoralized state he continues to discharge his parental obligations with undiminished zeal. And, though he allows his two wives to share the task of sitting during the day between them, he will not suffer any one to divide with him the onerous responsibility of keeping guard over the eggs at night. A gentleman who had spent many years of his life in keeping ostriches and studying their ways, told me that the conscientious performance of the domestic duties chiefly depends on the *morale* of the male bird. Until the tale of eggs is complete, the whole family often huddle together in the nest, and apparently treat this solemn institution with unbecoming levity. As soon as the process of laying is complete, the male bird takes the first spell of sitting, and then gives place to the ladies, whom he is very careful to see thoroughly carry out their domestic obligations.

The severity of the drought was fully proved by the state of the Buffalo river, which at this season, usually full to the brim, was now a meagre brook, that hardly rose above the hoofs of the oxen as they stopped in mid-stream to quench their thirst. The farther we went the worse it seemed, and it was only by the help of occasional "forage," which the exigencies of the case fully demanded, that we managed to get over the ground at all. But, everything considered, we made fair average "treks" (two and a half miles an hour being considered first-rate going in an ox-wagon—indeed, it is the utmost rate of speed that can be kept up for any time), and twelve days after our departure from Utrecht we saw Maritzburg lying below us from the Town Hill.

To our eyes, so long unaccustomed to any collection of houses, it looked of imposing magnitude, and fully meriting the distinctive title of "the city," which we so grudgingly accorded it on our march up country. How pretty it looked too, especially to dwellers fresh from the wilderness like ourselves, embowered in trees—an oasis in the plain, that rolled its grassy waves and

slopes in every direction as far as the eye could reach, with the cathedral peeping out from amidst the greenery, Fort Napier and the tents lying in foreground to the right!

Ever since we have been here, we have been hurrying from shop to shop, making our final purchases, and getting our outfit for the homeward voyage; winding up with the stupendous dissipation of going to the ball which was given to the High Commissioner.

This ball has been *the* topic of conversation everywhere for weeks past, and the distances people have travelled to attend it ought to have been recorded on emblazoned vellum pages for presentation to Sir Bartle Frere, as conveying (in the present state of transport) a compliment that could hardly be too highly appreciated.

To our eyes, accustomed to the crush in ball-rooms at home, the perfect absence of any attempt at a crowd had rather a chilling effect, though I can easily believe that so many of the aristocracy of Natal had never been got together for social purposes before.

The ball-room was the coolest I have ever been in, and I think the high gods who occupied

Olympian seats upon the stage must have found the draughts there almost more than refreshing. There was a strong muster of the beauty and fashion of Natal, and if the lovely English complexions were conspicuous by their absence, it was, of course, the climate that was in fault. For myself, I presented a spectacle which people at home would have gazed upon with awe, exhibiting a face of brilliant brick-red, beautifully set off by a white dress and cap—a brother officer of G——'s assuring me that I was by far the darkest (or at least most highly coloured) white lady he had seen during the whole course of his pretty extensive experience. But, forbid it, Heaven, that I should allow a little sun tan, and the meagre condition of my travelling wardrobe, to withhold me from enthusiastically gazing upon a personage whose efforts have been so largely calculated to aid, let us say, promotion in my husband's profession!

The only part of the arrangements that left anything to be desired was the supper, which was badly arranged on long tables crowded together as if for a school feast, half the seats being so nearly inaccessible that you had to struggle

and, as Yankees say, "squirm" to get at them, as if you were pushing your way to a stall at the opera.

Seeing we contributed fifty shillings as our share towards the success of the entertainment, we feel we have a right to hope Sir Bartle Frere enjoyed his ball. The tickets sound expensive, but must in reality have been cheapness itself, considering that very excellent champagne was supplied to both guests and waiters with equal copiousness—a fact of which my husband had ocular demonstration in the supper-room.

H.M.S. "Tyne,"
November 3.

Life being made up of partings, in due course the moment came for us to say farewell to Maritzburg, though my husband felt that his good-bye would probably not be a final one; and when we found ourselves once more in our comfortable hotel at Durban, I seemed to realize, for the first time, that we were going home. There was yet another parting to be gone through. The faithful Kafir, who had accompanied us in all our wanderings, was put up to auction on the same market square

where I had purchased her some eight or nine months ago, and she went off very contentedly with her new owner, and, to all appearances, with no regret for her old ones.

We have our usual luck in getting on this ship, seeing that she rolls so tremendously that one almost wonders why she does not turn quite over and come up like a porpoise on the other side. Of course, her admirers apologize for this by saying she is never known to pitch, which it is difficult to be surprised at, seeing that, in her proportions, she resembles nothing so much as a gigantic darning-needle. For the last four days we have had such a swell, and heavy sea, as surprise even those who know this coast, and till yesterday we have not had a moment's rest, day or night. It is so wearying; glass and china smashing wholesale, wine and beer running all over the dinner-table, impossible to keep still anywhere, till I took refuge in my berth, where, wedged in with chairs and pillows, I sought the rest that we all so wished for. The captain, however, slung a hammock for me on the poop, and I lay there several hours during the two worst days.

Our troubles began when we got on the tug

at Durban to come over the bar to the ship. We were all on deck. I was sitting aft amongst the soldiers, so was G——, when we got to the bar and all the water began splashing up. We managed, though, to keep tolerably dry, and G—— said we were over at last; so we began to breathe again. Alas! we were rather premature in our congratulations—at that minute we were just on the bar. A great, green, white-crested wave appeared at the side; I had just time to sit down on the floor and hold on to some fixture or other, when the wave was on us, swept clean over our heads, and left some tons of water swilling about on the deck, which took some time running off. We were all drenched from head to foot, but we have got so used to trifling accidents of this nature that we only laughed, though we had not a dry thread amongst us. Those who were "forrard" did not get into such a pickle; but the worst was yet to come. When we reached the ship, the sea became so rough that it was impossible to embark more than a few of the men. These got off the tug on to a lighter that was alongside the *Tyne*, and from her scrambled up the ship's side by a rope-ladder; but the swell

was so great that, as the lighter rose almost to a level with the deck of the great troopship, the men ran considerable risk of having their legs crushed between the two. Also the master of the tug, which was grinding against the lighter, afraid of breaking her up and having to pay damages, after much shouting and exchange of friendly (?) sentiments with the crew of the *Tyne*, put off again with us on board, and lay at some distance, awaiting the arrival of one of the *Tyne's* lifeboats.

The sea was, however, too rough to enable them to do more than embark me and a few invalids, and it was no easy matter to get into the lifeboat from the tug. Some of the poor men were nervous, and if you missed your footing when the boat rose, it was a case of waiting for the next roll. At last we all literally tumbled into the boat, and then began "climbing up the climbing waves," and rushing down-hill the other side, till we managed to come alongside the *Tyne*. There were great difficulties to contend with even here. It was so hard in this "perpetual motion" to reach the ship's ladder, though there were sailors there to catch us. We had to stand on the

edge of the boat and seize a rope from the ship, and, as the boat rose, make a spring for the ladder, the sailors calling out "Now!" when the fatal moment arrived. They called out "Now!" to me at the wrong moment, just as the boat sank again into the trough of the sea, so I missed the ladder and tumbled back into the boat. However, at the next jump I caught it all right, and came down on "all-fours" on the ladder, a wave of course drenching me again, and so I was dragged into the ship. A good sleep between blankets while my clothes were drying soon restored me, and I woke up none the worse.

With the next tide the remainder of the men and the baggage were safely slung on board in a basket, and soon after the shores of Natal were sinking out of sight as the *Tyne* plunged through the heavy swell.

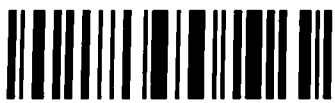
Nothing worth mentioning remains to be added to my South African experiences. Simon's Bay and Capetown are so well known that any description of them would be rendered stale by repetition. These few pages pretend to no importance, and have no higher aim than the amusement of an idle half-hour. Proud should I feel if I could

hope that I have helped, even by a few faint touches, to render more distinct and clear that picture of a comparatively unfamiliar country which English men and women are trying to bring before their imagination at this moment.

THE END.

PRINTED AT THE CAXTON PRESS, BECCLES. *S. & H.*

15


00038387

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018